

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO  
LINGUISTIC ARTICULATION**

ANDREW MARK INKPIN

University College London

Submitted for the degree of PhD in Philosophy

RD E OFFICE  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
SENATE HOUSE  
MALET STREET  
LONDON WC1E 7HU

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## ABSTRACT

The overall aim of the thesis is to argue that important aspects of language are best understood by a 'phenomenological' approach and to assess the contribution this makes to philosophical understanding of language.

The principal task is to develop a tenable view of the role language plays in understanding the world, i.e. linguistic articulation, by drawing on three paradigmatic conceptions of language, each of which is 'phenomenological' in the sense of aspiring to describe accurately our experience of language. Since each paradigm accentuates certain aspects of linguistic phenomena, so that none is satisfactory by itself, the three are critically integrated to yield a more balanced overall picture. The first paradigm, the early Heidegger's, is taken to set out a general framework for thinking of language and to identify two poles: language is understood to be grounded in everyday practice, yet ideally its forms serve to present features of the world as they in themselves are. The two further paradigms allow these poles to be filled out in greater detail. Thus Merleau-Ponty's conception of language, which centres on creative expression and incorporates Saussure's idea of language as a 'system of differences', is used to explain the way language presents its objects. Conversely, the later Wittgenstein's view of language as interwoven with day-to-day human practice(s) is used to explicate the practical grounding of language.

The thesis then seeks to highlight and assess the broader philosophical implications of the resultant combined phenomenological approach. Focusing on Heidegger's idea of 'prepredicative' founding, it first examines the relationship between the presentational and practical feats identified by this approach and more standard Neo-Fregean semantics-based conceptions of language. Finally, it is considered whether this combined phenomenological view, in particular the ways it sees language use as constituting awareness of its objects, has realist or nonrealist implications.

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## INTRODUCTION

# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE

*Pour bien apprécier les actions des hommes,  
il les faut prendre dans tous leurs rapports  
et c'est ce qu'on ne nous apprend point à faire.*  
Rousseau

The present thesis was motivated by certain kinds of experience. All of us, of course, have experience of language. But familiarity with our linguistic tools and the circumstances of their use means that words usually come to us as effortlessly as the actions they accompany or embody, so that by default we lack awareness of the ways language mediates understanding of the world and what it is about language that enables it to do so.

Speaking personally, such default experience of language was put in a different perspective by the experience of living and working for several years in a country whose language is not my own. One aspect of this were the everyday inadequacies that accompany an intermediate grasp of a foreign language. Even when able to 'get by', in the sense of coping with most common practical needs, second-language competence is typically characterized by inflexibility and brittleness. The link between pragmatic and linguistic competence is, however, ambivalent. On the one hand, syntactic and semantic errors very often do not impede you in doing what you want to do, and an interlocutor – if need be, a sympathetic one – will understand 'what you are saying' even if your own words fail to say it. On the other hand, even slight changes in circumstances or unexpected variations on standardly 'scripted' procedures can bring a breakdown in pragmatic fluency by requiring linguistic knowledge that is off the beaten track. Indeed, such problems persist even with a high degree of fluency: Long after we can make ourselves understood without difficulty, limitations in grammatical flexibility and a restricted vocabulary can mean that our powers of articulation – our ability to articulate thoughts – lack subtlety and precision, leading us to feel inhibited in the exercise of our intelligence.

Default experience of language contrasts not only with cases in which we are palpably deficient as second-language speakers, but also with situations in which we are forced to reflect upon and extend understanding of our first language. This typically becomes particularly clear in what might be called ‘interfacing situations’ between two languages. For example, in teaching your first language to foreigners, you rapidly become aware of the difficulties of explaining the way we use words in terms of both grammar and meaning. Or again, when translating from a foreign language into a first language you often encounter lacunae and vulnerabilities in your ability to find the right words – those carrying relevant connotations and conveying appropriate contrasts. Such experiences have a sobering effect. You become aware that you have a limited grasp of your first language too, no matter how effortless ‘mastery’ of it might otherwise seem. However, sensitivity to such limitations does not depend on the contrast with a second language. There are other examples of more careful, skilled or creative use of language in which reflective awareness of the expressions to be used plays a central role. Poetry, literary or legal writing would be obvious examples in which the choice of particular words is of the essence; but demands of the same kind can arise in personal or emotionally delicate communication. In such cases we are careful about our choice of expression because we expect to be held in some way accountable for the potential implications of our words.

Though clearly an extreme case, the difficulties encountered in translation and in reflective use of language came for me to be epitomized in Martin Heidegger’s philosophical prose. Heidegger’s writings are characterized by the inseparability of the articulation of his thoughts from the interpretation of individual words. Unsurprisingly, this is difficult to convey in translation, since the difficulties concerned emerge precisely through Heidegger’s exploitation of peculiarities of German. But to give some indication of what is involved consider, as one example of many, Heidegger’s characterization of modern technology as ‘das *Ge-stell*’ (VA 23). Being based on the idiomatic German word ‘Gestell’, meaning framework, rack, or shelf, this is immediately suggestive of both constraint by a rigid framework and the commodification of an enviroing world to be stored up on shelves. Beyond this, however, Heidegger weaves a rich web of association relying on its stem ‘stellen’ (to put or place). First, he contrasts the way in which earlier generations had ‘bestellt’ – meaning: to tend, or care for – the land with the way modern technological practices

makes demands on (*herausfordern*) nature. For these too the land is something to be 'bestellt', but now in the word's sense of ordering or demanding something (*VA* 18). Above all the term 'Ge-stell' serves to signal an intimate link between the nature of modern technology and the modern-age world-view, one supposedly already expressed in a series of established idiomatic locutions involving 'stellen'. Thus rather than tending and caring, modern technology is a way of producing (*her-stellen*) that exhibits a confrontational, predatory mind-set: entities are to be tracked down or hunted (*nach-stellen*), fixed by observation (*fest-stellen*), seized or secured for our ends (*sicher-stellen*).<sup>1</sup> This in turn is linked with modern-age thinking's ontologization of the subject-object distinction, following which the way objects of thought are presented or modelled (*dar-stellen*) takes on the specific character of putting objects before (*vor-stellen*; 'representing' to) consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Heidegger typically, as in this example, both exploits the established meaning of words and simultaneously gives them a highly idiosyncratic meaning within the framework of his theory, while relying on, so to speak, 'etymological' clues in the form of words as an indication of their meaning. The intended experience is that his key terminology should acquire a peculiar expressive intensity, with Heidegger's suggested interpretations of terms apparently resonating with their familiar established sense. This approach has both its admirers, who are sympathetic to Heidegger's claims to be bringing out the deep 'original' sense of words, and its detractors, who dismiss it as mere punning or 'word play'. Without wanting to adjudicate the philosophical expediency or otherwise of this approach to philosophy, it seems to me that the way Heidegger exploits expressive potentials in the (German) language does reveal something significant about the way language works more generally – though not, *pace* Heidegger, that this has anything to do with the recovery of 'original' meanings.

As already suggested, this brief catalogue of non-default linguistic circumstances is drawn from personal experience. Although in itself that fact is of no

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<sup>1</sup> These terms all occur in Heidegger's description of the *Ge-stell* in the essay 'The Question concerning Technology': cf. *VA* 19, 24 (*herstellen*); 22, 25 (natural science '*stellt der Natur ... nach*'); 11, 18, 26 (*feststellen*); 27 ('*sicherzustellende Bestände*'). In 'Science and Contemplation' Heidegger tersely characterizes calculative modern science as a '*nachstellend-sicherstellendes Vorgehen*' and explains that '*Das nachstellende Vorstellen, das alles Wirkliche in seiner verfolgbareren Gegenständigkeit sicherstellt, ist der Grundzug des Vorstellens, wodurch die neuzeitliche Wissenschaft dem Wirklichen entspricht*' (*VA* 53, 51 f.).

<sup>2</sup> *VA* 24 f. For this view of 'Vorstellen' cf. *HW* 91 ff.

philosophical interest, the experiences sketched are. First, because they are *kinds* of experience that are generally available, so that anyone in the right circumstances is likely to have them. Second, although these experiences contrast with default, pre-reflective experience of language, there are no extra ingredients involved. The ways we fail of linguistic competence and the factors we draw on in extending our understanding of language, or in making highly reflective or expressive use of language, should all somehow be either in play or latent in all language use. Such experiences can therefore be expected to shed light on what is involved in language use more generally, and in this sense to be of interest to or illuminated by philosophy of language.

This expectation, it seems to me, is not met by many common approaches in contemporary philosophy of language. To take perhaps the most obvious example, one would look in vain to Quine's views about translation for insight into the difficulties posed by understanding or rendering in another language the nuances of Heidegger's language use. Quine's behaviouristic view of radical translation simply does not articulate the kind of factors that would enable one to understand Heidegger's linguistic practices – nor indeed to explicate the standards of pragmatic adequacy or expressive subtlety alluded to in the examples above.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Quine is not alone. Indeed most philosophical approaches to language allow themselves to be guided by antecedent assumptions about what language should be like – the degree of systematicity or form it should have, the epistemological function it is desired or perceived to play, how it connects with philosophy of mind or metaphysics etc. – in a way leaving them peculiarly insensitive to the factors that speakers might perceive to be at work in different kinds of linguistic phenomenon. So, while I am not suggesting that such approaches lack value, it seems that there is a need at least to explain how such theories relate to the various kinds of experience speakers can have of language.

A significant step in the right direction is provided by Charles Taylor's (1985, 218) distinction between 'designative' and 'expressive' conceptions of language. Whereas designative conceptions concentrate on referential or extensional aspects of language, 'expressive' conceptions focus on language's 'power to make things manifest' (Taylor 1985, 238). While stressing that, since they address quite different questions, there is no conflict between these two broad approaches to language,

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<sup>3</sup> Curiously, Quine (1969a, 80) distinguishes his interests from what he disdainfully refers to as 'ordinary unphilosophical translations'.

Taylor (1985, 252) nonetheless suggests as a deficiency of the designative view that it does not ‘take account of the matrix of activity within which the connections between words and their referents arise and are sustained’. By contrast the nondesignative approach – which he also refers to as the ‘HHH’ (Herder, Humboldt, Hamann) conception – holds out the prospect of a richer philosophical understanding of language by treating language as a ‘speaking activity’ which Taylor characterizes in terms of three key features. Thus language is taken to be a medium through which (a) things are formulated or articulated, and so brought to explicit awareness, (b) subject matter is ‘put in the public space’, and in which (c) characteristically human concerns are constituted (Taylor 1985, 256 ff.). Taylor goes on to associate the nondesignative approach with a series of further theses – e.g. that language is holistic, is always the common property of a ‘speech community’, or is somehow mysterious due to a link with ‘subject-related properties’ – which one might disagree with. But I want to suggest that the particular virtue of the nondesignative approach, in the minimal form just sketched, lies in identifying a general perspective and a corresponding set of questions. Language, on this approach, is a process of articulation in the public space that plays a constitutive role in human actions and thought. The right questions to ask in understanding its speaking activity are what makes up linguistic articulation, what it is for language to express or realize meaning, or wherein its power to make things manifest lies.

In broad terms the present thesis aims to address these questions, and to do so in a way that accords properly with the various kinds of experience speakers can come to have of language. This latter requirement establishes a sense of priorities that I think is best summed up by describing the approach to be taken as a ‘phenomenological’ one. Before considering how the remainder of the thesis addresses the nature of linguistic articulation, it will therefore be helpful to say something about what it is for a conception of language to be ‘phenomenological’.

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The term ‘phenomenological’ is commonly used in two not obviously confluent ways. On the one hand, it is frequently used to refer to the intellectual tradition initiated by Edmund Husserl and associated with some kind of basic methodological commitment, such as a descriptive return to ‘things themselves’, intuition as a source

of validity, or reliance on the ‘phenomenological reduction’. This use is complicated by the fact that even among this tradition’s authors there is no clear consensus as to what that commitment is, making it something of a commonplace that there are as many kinds of ‘phenomenology’ as there are ‘phenomenologists’.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, ‘phenomenology’ also has an established use in English-speaking philosophy, epitomized in the expression ‘getting the phenomenology right’, on which it simply conveys the need for accounts of something to be ‘true to appearances’, i.e. to tally with the way that thing seems to us. To some extent both uses of the term are relevant to the present thesis. However, I will take the second sense – subsequently referred to as *Phenomenological Accountability*, or simply PA – to be the defining feature of a ‘phenomenological’ approach. In the case of language, PA translates into the requirement that a conception of language be descriptively accountable to the way linguistic processes appear to speakers. That is, its various features should be motivated by the need to reflect the complexity of (linguistic) phenomena, such that without them it would not be possible to describe these phenomena accurately.<sup>5</sup>

In the nature of the case, PA is a somewhat vague – though not altogether empty – requirement. Despite this, it can be clarified and qualified in several ways. Most obviously perhaps, the notion of phenomenology, or appearances, relevant here is not the first-personal sense found in philosophy of mind. That is, the concern is not with phenomenal aspects of consciousness (for example, pain) to which one agent might have ‘privileged access’. Linguistic phenomena, as most famously argued by Wittgenstein, take place in a public space, so that it is to generally available experience that a phenomenological conception of language answers.

The role of initial appearances, or default experience, is somewhat ambivalent. For our default experience of language, as already noted, is that language lacks salience: rather than appearing to us in any specific way, our experience of language is usually submerged in experience of the world more generally. Yet at the same time, to talk of ‘descriptive accountability’ to the way things appear to be seems to imply that default (or original) experience has a character of its own, one to some extent determinate, of which we can be made aware, and in respect of which it hence makes

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<sup>4</sup> For example, despite advocating phenomenology as ‘a mode of doing philosophy’, Dermot Moran somewhat awkwardly concedes that ‘phenomenology cannot be understood simply as a method, a project, a set of tasks; in its historical form it is primarily a set of people’ (Moran 2000, xv, xiv).

<sup>5</sup> As Crane puts it ‘a phenomenological idea’ is one ‘which emerges in the process of reflecting on what [e.g.] mental life is like’ – as something we cannot see how to do without (Crane 2001, 17, 23; cf. 3, 8).

sense to talk of accountability.<sup>6</sup> There is no real conflict here. Even though we might usually lack focal awareness of certain features of language, we can still be accountable to default experience in the sense that we would recognize the possibility (or necessity) of redescribing that experience as including them, once pointed out, without any sense of distortion.

However, as outlined above, not only does experience of language come in different varieties, but non-default experiences of language can enrich our understanding by drawing attention to otherwise unnoticed features. This suggests two possibilities for the phenomenology and a corresponding conception of language. One would be to view experience of language overall as a juxtaposition of various kinds of linguistic phenomenon, descriptions of which would be collected to form a phenomenological conception of language. The second would be to see the variety of possible experiences of language as subject to a unifying constraint on an appropriate conception of language: namely, that since in each case it is language that is experienced, the same factors should be present in all these different modes of experience. This implies that, though quite different kinds of formative factors, or structurations, might be involved in accounting for various phenomena, they should be considered properly part of language only insofar as they must be thought of as present in all linguistic experience. On this approach – which is intended here – the task for a satisfactory conception of language is to make clear what those formative factors are and how their interplay can issue in respectively differing phenomena.

If phenomenology is defined in terms of descriptive accountability to experience and seeks to identify structures underlying different kinds of phenomena, then it might be wondered how it differs from science. Is Chomskian Universal Grammar, say, part of what I am calling ‘phenomenology’? In fact, although this conviction plays no role in this thesis, I believe there should be continuity, of the kind Merleau-Ponty assumed, between phenomenology and science. There is, however, a difference that might be described metaphorically in terms of surface and depth: the intention here is to map features of the experiential surface rather than the underlying structures of linguistic phenomena. The relevant sense of surface is secured by the thought that phenomenology is descriptively accountable to the way linguistic

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<sup>6</sup> This, I take it, is the point of Husserl’s distinction between the ‘flow of experience’ (*Erlebnisstrom*) and reflective acts in §78 of his *Ideas I*. Though he emphasizes that it is ‘through reflectively experiencing acts alone that we know anything about the flow of experience’ (Husserl 1992b, 168), the knowledge attained is knowledge of the original flow of experience.

phenomena appear *to speakers*. Phenomenological features of language are such that any speaker would be expected to recognize them, at least once they are pointed out, rather than involving extended processing, reasoning or systematization in the way a scientific theory does. Through this link with noninferential familiarity phenomenology remains distinguished as a descriptive undertaking.<sup>7</sup>

But given this superficiality, so to speak, why should phenomenology be of philosophical interest? Isn't the point of philosophy to get beyond appearances to underlying reality? An initial response to this is that one should be wary of the assumption that reality and appearances stand opposed. In particular, since language is artefactual, existing only in virtue of speakers' somehow understanding it, it is doubtful that this assumption can be made about language. Furthermore, given this artefactual status, a phenomenological conception of language can be expected at least to articulate conditions of adequacy for theories that probe 'below' the surface of phenomena. Nevertheless, it is to some extent implicit in a phenomenological approach of the kind outlined here that philosophical theses are the end result rather than the starting point of enquiry. Although a certain description of phenomena may be loaded with metaphysical or epistemological implications, the whole point of a phenomenological approach is to extract such theses from an understanding of phenomena. With this in mind, the philosophical interest of a phenomenological approach to language should be expected to emerge in the course of the thesis, and will be addressed, so to speak, head on in the final chapter.

At this point it might be thought that the conception of phenomenology just outlined is difficult to reconcile with the term's historical application to the phenomenological movement. For straightforwardly to invoke the idea of experience makes phenomenological accountability look like some sort of empirical philosophy, of the kind phenomenology might be thought to oppose. While this is perhaps true of Husserl's phenomenology, I think the view suggested here is consistent with Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's later focus on the importance of lived experience. Though it is not possible to show this in detail here, I want to indicate very briefly the plausibility of a reconciliation with the historical sense of 'phenomenological' by

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Heidegger's characterization of phenomenological 'description' as avoiding determinations that are not directly exhibited (SZ 35). Husserl's talk of 'evidence' and 'intuition' similarly relies on the idea that phenomenological data are non-inferentially accessible (e.g. Husserl 1992c, 58 [§24]).



considering how two non-assimilable features of Husserl's position came to be rejected by his successors.

The first is that, although he was in some sense committed to describing the structures of conscious experience, Husserl distances himself from straightforward appeals to experience of the kind suggested by PA. This is because both everyday and scientific experience are characterized by what he terms the 'natural attitude', the background assumption that the world as a whole exists (Husserl 1992b, 61 [§30]). The problem, as Husserl saw it, with this assumption is that enquiry remains empirically conditioned, i.e. in some sense answerable to facts, or the contingencies of the actual world. Husserl thought, however, that the explanatory task of philosophy cannot be bound in this way and requires a modified form of experience in what he calls the 'transcendental field of experience' (Husserl 1992c, 28 [§12] ff.). This is to be distinguished by both its 'purity' – i.e. that 'no experience, qua experience [...] can take on *the function of justification*' (Husserl 1992b, 20 f. [§7]) – and its extension of the notions of experience and description – via those of eidetic intuition and eidetic variation – into the realm of the possible (cf. Husserl 1992c, 70 ff. [§34]). Hence the need for and the importance of the so-called 'phenomenological reduction': Although Husserl's phenomenology relies on the investigator's experience, the reduction comprises the set of moves – disregarding the distinction between actual and potential, and attending to the ('eidetic') form of mental contents – needed reflectively to transform natural experience into its pure equivalent.

By contrast, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty eschew the phenomenological reduction and instead emphasize the accountability of phenomenology to the experience humans usually (in the natural attitude) have. Thus *Being and Time* is built around – what claims to be – a description of 'inauthentic' everyday disclosure of the world and acknowledges that empirical (or 'vulgar') intuition is an 'unavoidable presupposition' in securing the 'mode of access that genuinely belongs' to ontological enquiry (SZ 37, cf. 31). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty relies constantly, as a matter of course, on scientific findings and generally insists on the need to found phenomenological analysis in the 'lived world': 'in a word phenomenology' is 'the decision to demand from experience itself its proper sense' (*PdP* iii, 338). Underlying these appeals to lived experience is a fundamental disagreement about the relationship between the actual and the possible. Husserl holds that "in itself" the science of pure possibilities is prior to that of actual realities and makes this [science

of actual realities] possible as a science'.<sup>8</sup> Heidegger's opposition to this view comes to a focus in the notion of Dasein: such (human) entities not only cannot be thought of as actualizing timeless or unconditioned possibilities, but themselves form the ontological precondition for the being of possibilities (as Dasein's projects or plans).<sup>9</sup> And because Dasein is always conditioned by history and empirical facts, this is tantamount to saying – against Husserl – that possibilities, experience, and phenomena are always empirically conditioned. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's approach 'preserves' from empiricism 'the character of facticity': 'That is also why phenomenology is a phenomenology, that is to say, studies the *appearance* of being to consciousness, instead of supposing its possibility to be given in advance'.<sup>10</sup>

This disagreement over the status of the possible is linked with a second point of difference between Husserl's views and those of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, namely the supposed ontological basis of intentionality. Despite having aspired to metaphysical neutrality in his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl later came to consider phenomenology as a form of transcendental idealism, and so to postulate an ontological realm of transcendental subjectivity (and later intersubjectivity). One of Heidegger's principal objections to Husserl is that he needed, but lacked, some conception of the mode of being (*Seinsart*) of what he was calling 'transcendental subjectivity'.<sup>11</sup> The crux of Heidegger's objection, which he saw as consequence of Husserl's requirement of 'presuppositionlessness', is that radical enquiry into the nature of intentionality – i.e. enquiry that claims to be discovering its own conditions of possibility – cannot fail to address the nature of its ontological setting (cf. *PGZ* 123). Heidegger was moved by this (as I shall call it) *ontological realizability condition*, to drop the idea of a transcendental subject and instead to think of intentionality as being constituted by concrete mortal agents (Dasein). This move is again paralleled in Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the 'image of a constituted world' implicit in the idea of an 'absolute constituting consciousness' in favour of a focus on

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<sup>8</sup> Husserl 1992c, 74 [§34]. – Similarly in *Ideas I* he claims that the 'old ontological doctrine that knowledge of "possibilities" must precede that of actual realities [*Wirklichkeiten*], is in my view, as long as it is correctly understood and made use of in the right way, a prodigious truth' (Husserl 1992b, 178 [§79]).

<sup>9</sup> *SZ* 143 f. – Pöggeler (1989) argues powerfully that disagreement over the nature of modality was central to Heidegger's break with Husserl from 1927 onwards.

<sup>10</sup> *PdP* 74. See in particular Merleau-Ponty's treatment of 'our freedom', which 'does not destroy our situation, but is geared to it' (*PdP* 505, cf. 496 ff.).

<sup>11</sup> This formulation of Heidegger's challenge is found in correspondence with Husserl during their 1927 collaboration on the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article (Husserl 1968, 601 f.).

embodied agency.<sup>12</sup> ‘No philosophy’, he explains, ‘can ignore the problem of finitude on pain of not knowing itself as philosophy’ (*PdP* 48). In each case transcendental subjectivity is rejected as an ultimately unintelligible assumption, and replaced by a notion of concrete and finite subjectivity whose experience is recognizable – without ‘purification’ via the reduction – as corresponding to our own in the ‘natural attitude’.

As a historical thesis it could be argued that these differences are part of Heidegger’s, and perhaps Merleau-Ponty’s, attempt to be more consistently phenomenological than Husserl himself was – and in this spirit suggested that they are part of a dialectic internal to phenomenology guided by the idea of phenomenological accountability. But for the present purposes, since the following will draw on their views extensively, I have simply attempted to illustrate that it is plausible to think of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty as sharing commitment to PA in the dual sense that they (a) take phenomenology to be accountable to an ‘unpurified’ notion of experience in the ‘natural attitude’, and (b) posit forms of agency in which we can readily recognize ourselves.

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In view of the motivations set out above, the overall aim in the following chapters is to develop a phenomenological conception of the context and processes of linguistic articulation and at least to indicate the philosophical interest of the resultant position. The development of this view will draw extensively on three authors – Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein – with the aim of fusing their respective conceptions of language into an unified view. This strategy is guided by several convictions. First and foremost it seems to me that each of these authors’ conceptions of language captures something important about the phenomenology of language. But although according recognizably with certain aspects of our experience of language, each is also characterized by corresponding inadequacy or one-sidedness which yields either a vague or distorted picture of the whole. Accordingly, the aim here is critically to combine these three visions of language into a single overall view that is more balanced than each of its respective component positions. This, so to speak, exegetically committed strategy also requires

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<sup>12</sup> *PdP* 51, cf. 172: ‘Experience of the body forces us to recognize an imposition of sense which is not that of a universal constituting consciousness’.

a second kind of balance, between fidelity to and instrumentalization of the respective authors' views. Generally speaking my aim has been to capture accurately key aspects of each author's work, but to be guided by the task at hand rather than by the specific philosophical aims of each author. The phenomenological position I want to develop will therefore emerge by working through three views of language towards which – as should become clear – I am broadly, but not totally sympathetic. This approach has considerable potential to disappoint: to some it will too short on the exegetic side, to others too long. My aim, at least, has been to strike the right balance, that is, to do justice to the merits of each position while maintaining sufficient direction to avoid mere commentary.

The first chapter centres on Heidegger's conception of language in *Being and Time* (1927) with the aim of identifying a framework for a phenomenological conception of language, that is, a set of views about language which seems insightful and broadly correct, but stands in need of greater development. This Heideggerian framework, as I call it, operates at two levels. At a general level the concern is with an overall picture of the metaphysical situation of language. Thus chapter I starts by focusing on Heidegger's account of what he calls the 'ontological "place" of language', attempting to unravel apparently conflicting tendencies affecting the status of language in Heidegger's discussion. It is argued that several features of the resultant overall picture are motivated by the need for phenomenological enquiry to cohere with lived experience and should therefore generally characterize a phenomenological conception of language. Thus, in addition to rejecting the idea that language can be understood reductively as a 'formal' system of signs, Heidegger is led, I claim, to a view of language that eschews any contrast between an 'inside' and an 'outside' and instead sees it as embedded in or distributed over the wider world. As they parallel his nondualist view of Dasein as 'being-in-the-world', these general phenomenological commitments are summed up by talking of language as 'language-in-the-world'.

A central and distinctive feature of Heidegger's overall picture is the claim that the content of propositions, qua predicative judgements, is to be understood as founded in a 'prepredicative' grasp of the world. In fact, as I show, his view of language allows that language use can itself be an expression of prepredicative understanding alone. As opposed to the highly general commitments just mentioned, these claims provide a specific focus for assessing the differences between

Heidegger's and more mainstream philosophical views of language, which usually think of language's functioning primarily in terms of propositions and (predicative) judgement. To facilitate later assessment of these differences, several features of this general claim that propositional content is founded in prepredicative factors are identified. Thus prepredicative factors are interpreted as being functionally and structurally presupposed in propositional content, and as somehow shaping while remaining irreducible to inferential properties.

At a more specific level the Heideggerian framework involves a proposal as to how the articulatory feats and the function of linguistic signs should be understood. This is developed by considering the ambivalent attitude *Being and Time* takes towards routine language use ('idle talk') and how this can be accommodated by its conception of language. In doing this Heidegger's earlier view of philosophical concepts as 'formal indications' is drawn on to shed light on what he sees as the proper revelatory function of signs. The ambivalence can then be explained, I argue, by the development of this earlier view into a conception of signs as instruments in a dual sense. Linguistic signs, on this view, are instruments in both the generic sense of being tools for pointing out features of the world in an articulate manner, and in the differentiated sense of tools used to perform particular tasks in practice. Corresponding to these different modes of instrumentality I propose a distinction between *presentational sense* and *pragmatic sense*, reflecting two different ways in which the use of language is involved in understanding the world. On this Heideggerian model the articulatory feats of linguistic signs are to be understood in terms of these two kinds of sense which they unite.

The following two chapters operate in parallel to develop the views adumbrated by the Heideggerian framework at both the general and specific level. Chapter II focuses on Merleau-Ponty's conception of language around 1950. In general terms this treats language as a form of embodied expressive behaviour and highlights the need to understand its functioning without appeal to any completely constituted and fully determinate pattern of meaning. Although these general commitments lead Merleau-Ponty to, as I claim, an exaggerated emphasis on creative expression, the idea of 'indirect' sense he develops can be used to explicate the idea of presentational sense suggested by Heidegger's conception of linguistic signs. The notion of indirect sense is explored by considering both Merleau-Ponty's integration of Saussurean linguistics into his earlier view, and his use of modern painting as a

model for the expressive function of language. Whereas the former provides a detailed picture of the structure presentational sense can be understood to have, the latter provides an innovative model for the presentational function of linguistic signs. A characteristic feature of Merleau-Ponty's views, establishing a clear parallel with Heidegger's, is the attempt to understand the functioning of language in terms of prepredicative factors underlying conceptual meaning. Part of the task of this chapter is therefore to identify the positive aspects, the justification for and the limitations of the inchoately rational function Merleau-Ponty sees as characterizing indirect sense. The chapter concludes by setting out how the notion of presentational sense, qua indirect sense, provides a phenomenologically plausible way both of dealing with certain difficulties inherent in Heidegger's view of language and of understanding several kinds of linguistic experience, such as careful or innovative use and the relevance of etymology to meaning.

A feature common to both Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of language is that while both point to the foundational importance of pragmatic use of language, neither provides a detailed account of the relationship between human practices and linguistic articulation. In chapter III this omission is made good by drawing on the late Wittgenstein's conception of language, the defining feature of which is taken to be the emergence of the language-game analogy. At the general level Wittgenstein's – as I describe it – 'praxeological' conception of language is characterized by the intrinsic link between language use and patterns of human activity. However, in contrast to Wittgenstein's earlier model of language as a calculus it is also, as I attempt to show, characterized by several shifts resulting in a more relaxed view of language as a rule-governed activity. First, having been dissociated from the calculus model's ideal of full determinacy, the notion of rules is reconfigured, acquiring a more empirical feel and being gauged to language-game relative standards of determinacy. Second, the scope of rules becomes subject to a number of constraints on the language-game analogy, so that linguistic competence can be understood more broadly than on a fully rule-governed algorithmic model. By understanding these shifts, I argue, the notion of rules implicit in the language-game analogy is the key to a phenomenologically appropriate notion of the sense linguistic expressions have as means to particular ends in practice, and hence of pragmatic sense.

While it is fairly uncontroversial to think of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty as kindred spirits and as phenomenological authors, there are two potential problems in assimilating Wittgenstein to my approach here: first, whether Wittgenstein can be thought of as a ‘phenomenological’ thinker; second, whether his view can be assimilated to the idea of prepredicative sense suggested by the Heideggerian framework. In response to the first I outline how, although Wittgenstein cannot be accurately described as a phenomenological author, the maturing language-game analogy led him to a pattern of commitments and a conception of linguistic processes that are readily assimilable to a phenomenological conception of language. In response to the second, I argue that parallel commitments in the conditions he applies to rule-following and his view of the finite nature of justification allow the identification of a minimal sense of linguistic competence that can be considered prepredicative in Heidegger’s sense.

By the end of the third chapter it should be clear how Merleau-Ponty’s and Wittgenstein’s views can be integrated into a unified phenomenological conception of language within the Heideggerian framework identified by the first chapter. This unified position can, as hinted above, be seen as providing an answer to the kind of questions Taylor identifies by offering both a general picture of linguistic activity, and a specific view of the articulatory functions of linguistic signs as instruments characterized by presentational and pragmatic sense. However, having endeavoured to maintain a grounding in linguistic phenomena, this unified conception also sheds light on the catalogue of experiences outlined above by identifying the kind of features that can be appealed to both in gauging a speaker’s pragmatic fluency and in justifying the expressive or articulative adequacy of choosing particular words.

A phenomenological view of the kind developed here can hardly fail to have philosophical implications. Without claiming to exhaust such possibilities, the closing chapter IV aims at least to indicate its significance in a broader philosophical and discursive context by addressing two issues explicitly. First a contrast is made between the phenomenological approach here and what I call the ‘semantics approach’, characterized by general – broadly Fregean – assumptions about the primacy of the propositional and the subpropositional workings of language that are more or less standard in contemporary philosophy of language. I then attempt to assess the relationship between these two approaches by taking up Heidegger’s idea that propositional content is founded in prepredicative factors. Having considered

how the two approaches differ, and how this foundational claim is to be understood, Donald Davidson's proposal for an empirical theory of interpretation is discussed as an example showing how the need for a phenomenological conception of language arises within the semantics approach. I then outline how the semantics approach might view the phenomenological conception here as a partial theory of the background of abilities speakers require to exhibit semantic competence. One possibility is then that the phenomenological conception of language can be accommodated by the semantics approach in the sense of providing a well-behaved or weak foundation. That is, the need for a phenomenological conception of language is admitted on the assumption, the condition perhaps, that it simply fills out a picture of language's functioning which is already modelled adequately by formal semantics. Against this, I argue that a somewhat stronger foundational claim can be made on behalf of the phenomenological conception developed here. By indicating how presentational and pragmatic sense resist assimilation to the functional picture implicit in the semantics approach, it is claimed that these capture aspects of linguistic functioning not adequately captured by the semantics approach and hence make a distinct contribution to philosophical understanding of language.

The second issue, concluding the thesis, is whether or not the phenomenological conception of language developed here has realist or nonrealist implications. This question arises naturally, as the preceding chapters' emphasis on the involvement of presentational and pragmatic sense in constituting both thought and characteristically human concerns might seem to imply a form of idealism. At the same time, the latter's intimation of some kind of enclosure within language runs counter to my general emphasis on the embeddedness of language as language-in-the-world. Given the obvious parallel with Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world, this issue is considered in the light of the approach to realism and idealism found in *Being and Time*. Against this background I attempt to show how the constitutive and mediative roles of language can be understood as not introducing a potentially refractive or distortive breach in our contact with the world. Finally it is argued, in Heideggerian spirit, that by rejecting an inside-outside opposition, perhaps the most significant implication of a phenomenological conception of language is to enable a position beyond the traditional alternatives of realism and idealism.



## CHAPTER I

# A HEIDEGGERIAN FRAMEWORK

The aim of this chapter is to extract the framework for a phenomenological conception of language from the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* (*SZ*). Broadly speaking, this Heideggerian framework will comprise two levels: one general, one specific. At the general level the aim will be to build up a clear and tenable overall picture of the role Heidegger sees language having in the broader phenomenon of disclosure, before considering what characterizes it as a phenomenological conception of language. The more specific level will focus on the function Heidegger sees linguistic signs having in the phenomenon of disclosure, so to speak, on the way linguistic signs work.<sup>13</sup>

Before going any further, however, I want to make several comments about the approach to be taken here. To begin with, although Heidegger's interest in language is subordinate to his overall project (the question of being), the following exegesis assumes that his conception of language can be understood and assessed independently of this project. My talk of a 'Heideggerian framework' is then intended to signal both a broadly affirmative approach to Heidegger's views and that these are in need of some filling out. An important reason for the latter is that *SZ* deals with language only in a dispersed and fragmentary manner. Indeed Heidegger there concedes that language's mode of being has been left largely open, claiming only to identify its 'ontological "place"', and himself later hinted that *SZ*'s treatment of language comprises its 'basic deficiency' (*SZ* 166; *US* 93). This prompts the question: why look to *SZ* at all, rather than to later writings in which Heidegger's interest in language was more conspicuous? The principal reason for this is *SZ*'s emphasis on the foundational role of purposive understanding, and so implicitly the pragmatic dimension of language, which must be central to understanding the relation between language and lived human experience. Since this disappears completely from view in

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<sup>13</sup> Although here revised and extended, this chapter develops material originally included in my previously submitted MPhil thesis 'The Conception and Role of Language in *Being and Time*'. In particular sections 1.(i), 3 and 4 below partially reproduce text used in the earlier thesis.

Heidegger's later writings, it seems to me that, schematic as it may be, *SZ* furnishes a far better point of departure for a phenomenologically accurate conception of language. However, because *SZ*'s treatment of it is peripheral and somewhat schematic, the exegetic task cannot be simply to reproduce a conception of language that Heidegger in fact, or need have, expounded in precisely this form. Rather there is inevitably a need to fill in some gaps and for some interpretation, for which reason the framework that emerges might strictly speaking be viewed as Heideggerian rather than Heidegger's. While exegetic fidelity is certainly an aim, this qualification is a convenient reminder that my approach is intended to be primarily accountable to neither the aims nor letter of Heidegger's texts, but to their value for a phenomenological conception of language.

Finally, Heidegger's crafted and idiosyncratic use of language gives rise to another question of fidelity, and to two equally unsatisfactory tendencies in the literature. On the one hand, rightly discerning that his terminology is often highly deliberate and attuned to his views, many of Heidegger's more sympathetic readers adhere to or mimic his terminology as closely as possible. This tendency is particularly problematic when writing about Heidegger in languages other than German, and often yields cumbersome, artificial and nonidiomatic – if not simply unintelligible – rendition of his views.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, rightly interested in the philosophical value of his position, many writers – especially those in the so-called 'analytic' tradition – immediately paraphrase Heidegger's views using 'standard' vocabularies from contemporary philosophy of mind or language, and so risk effacing their distinctive physiognomy.<sup>15</sup> Without denying the respective advantages and disadvantages of these tendencies, my aim here will be to strike a balance by preserving the contours of Heidegger's analyses without excessive reliance on hermetic jargon and bringing out their broader philosophical significance. A potential difficulty in doing this is that some of Heidegger's terminology naturally invites confusion with less technical, less specific concepts. Where the risk of such confusion

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<sup>14</sup> In translating Heidegger there is an acute tension between – in Ashton's (1971, 22) apt characterization – two forms of literalism, the first a standard 'word-for-word' approach, the second a 'radical one of digging up the roots of words, no matter what their dictionary sense and current usage'. Sympathetic readers of Heidegger are often drawn to the latter.

<sup>15</sup> To provide just one example, Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* deploys a number of terms (e.g. *Erschlossenheit*, *Sinn*, *Bedeutung*, *Bedeutsamkeit*) that might lay some claim to be translated as 'meaning'. However, as each is intended to have a specific role in Heidegger's analysis, to equate any of them with meaning – quite apart from that term's potential ambiguity – would be precipitous and potentially misleading.

seems significant, I will resort to capitalizing certain terms (e.g. Understanding, Affectedness, Articulacy) so as to identify reference to Heidegger's specific use of them. This apparently clumsy measure has the advantage that non-capitalized use of such terms can be assumed not to allude to specifically Heideggerian nuances and so deployed in interpretative paraphrase.

The following chapter comprises five sections, of which the first two are concerned with the general level of the Heideggerian framework's overall picture of language. The first section sets out in general terms how the phenomenon of language is dealt with in *SZ*'s analysis of how human understanding of the world takes on determinate form, suggesting how apparent tensions can be reconciled to yield a coherent general picture. The second considers what distinguishes this as a phenomenological conception of language and offers a preliminary clarification of its broader philosophical relevance, focusing in particular on the foundation role claimed for 'prepredicative' factors. Starting – in the third section – with *SZ*'s ambivalent view of the role of language in everyday understanding, the subsequent three sections aim to bring out the disparate factors involved in Heidegger's view of the functioning of linguistic signs, and so to develop the Heideggerian framework at a more specific level. To understand the basis of this ambivalence the fourth section reviews Heidegger's earlier notion of 'formal indications' as a paradigm of the function Heidegger saw signs having in phenomenological enquiry. The final section shows how this, together with the foundational function of purposive understanding discussed in the first section, can account for *SZ*'s ambivalence about language, before bringing out how the apparently conflicting requirements underlying this ambivalence are combined in *SZ*'s conception of signs.

### **1. The context of language**

The context within which *SZ* locates language is set out in its 'preparatory' analytic of Dasein. The term 'Dasein' is central to Heidegger's thinking and its precise interpretation is a potentially delicate matter, but for the present purposes it can be taken simply to refer to humans as bearers of understanding of the world. The proximal aim of the 'preparatory' analysis is to set out in general terms the structure of the understanding that Dasein embodies. The topic of language makes a fairly late entry into Heidegger's discussion, featuring as the *terminus ad quem* of the processes in which what he calls 'Significance' takes on articulate form. Considering briefly

how the latter is characterized is therefore the natural place to start in properly appreciating *SZ*'s conception of language.

(i) *The articulation of Significance*: The concept of 'Significance' (*Bedeutsamkeit*) is introduced in Heidegger's description of the 'worldliness of the world' (*SZ* 63), which centres on a contrast between 'Things' and 'Equipment' and aims to show that the being of Equipment is somehow prior to that of Things. Heidegger understands a 'Thing' (*Ding, res*) to be an entity individuated in terms of (determinate) properties; he terms the being, or mode of existence, of Things 'Vorhandenheit', which I shall render as 'Thingness' (often 'presentness-at-hand' or 'occurentness').<sup>16</sup> The paradigm for entities appropriately characterized in these terms are inanimate natural objects: to be, as a natural Thing, is just to be present in the world with certain properties. Conversely, on Heidegger's distinction, 'Equipment' (*Zeug, πράγματα*) refers to entities as encountered in (practically) dealing with one's environment and as individuated with regard to 'what they are for', i.e. their purpose.<sup>17</sup> Heidegger labels the equipmental way of being 'Zuhandenheit', which I shall render as 'Handiness' (often 'readiness-to-hand' or 'availability'), and treats the hammer as paradigmatic of this way of being.

Employing the Equipment/Things distinction, Heidegger somewhat polemically rejects the idea that the 'worldliness of the world' is to be understood as the totality of Things, hence as a naturalistic (physicalistic) whole, and instead urges that the primary being of entities – their 'Ansichsein' or 'in-itselfness' (*SZ* 71, 75, 87) – lies in their equipmental being, or Handiness. This issues in the claim that 'the world' is an instrumental nexus, not the sum total of Things, but a whole of

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<sup>16</sup> *SZ* 42 and passim. Thingness, or 'reality' (*Realität, 'res-ality'*; cf. *SZ* 67 f.) is an important *technical term* for Heidegger referring to entities the being of which can be characterized in terms of essence and existence: essence is a properties-based determination of what the entity is (its 'whatness'), existence denotes its presence or absence in the actual world. According to Heidegger, this way of conceiving entities is a traditional legacy of ancient ontology informed by the idea of (artisanal) production, since such production is guided by an antecedent notion (the 'essence') of what is to be made (cf. *GP* 108-172). Heidegger believes that this *essentia-existentia* model cannot be intelligibly applied to all kinds of entity, most notably to humans (*SZ* 42, 151), so that a broader palette of ontological categories is needed to characterize adequately other ways of being.

<sup>17</sup> *SZ* 68. As Heidegger puts it, 'Zeug ist wesenhaft "etwas, um zu ..."' I am rendering this 'um zu', as well as Heidegger's talk of an entity's 'Wozu' (e.g. *SZ* 78), as what an entity, as Equipment, is 'for'. These terms are often rendered as the 'the in order to', the 'to which', or the 'towards which'. However, what an entity 'is for' idiomatically renders Heidegger's equally idiomatic talk of its 'um zu ...' or 'Wozu'.

instrumental relations (*Verweisungen*<sup>18</sup>) between entities. It is this ‘structure of the world’, as the purposive or instrumental whole in terms of which humans make sense of their environment and themselves, that Heidegger calls ‘Significance’ (SZ 86 f.).

This notion of the world – as an instrumental rather than a naturally causal nexus – is perhaps a somewhat unusual one, according to which ‘worldliness’, as Heidegger puts it, ‘is [...] itself an existentiale’, i.e. a structural feature of Dasein, of humans as understanding beings. So in the following explanation that ‘world’ principally refers to ‘that “within which” a factual Dasein [...] “lives”’ both ambiguity and considerable suggestiveness are at work (SZ 64 f.). For while hinting at engagement with the traditional external world problem – which he indeed intends to solve in passing – what Heidegger actually means in talking of the ‘world’ and its ‘worldliness’ is the lived world, the ‘world of our involvements’ (Taylor 1995, 107), and the fabric of this world *as experienced*.<sup>19</sup> This appears to suggest that the distinction between Thingness and Handiness reflects a straightforward phenomenological claim about the way entities are first encountered in lived experience of the world, viz. that purposive understanding precedes objective understanding of entities.<sup>20</sup> But Heidegger sees the distinction as ontological, between two ways of being, rather than as a merely phenomenological difference. He states explicitly that Handiness ‘may not [...] be understood as a mere character of grasping [*als bloßer Auffassungscharakter*]’ and that claims to ontological priority are bound to respect the ‘ontological sense of knowing’, and hence the ‘sequence of discovering and appropriating dealings with the “world”’ (SZ 71). In other words, Heidegger claims that ontological priorities cannot neglect epistemological priorities, that the order of being is bound by the experiential order of awareness of being.

An obvious question is how natural entities fit into this picture: How do such entities – supposed to be as they are ‘in themselves’, independently of and prior to human understanding – depend on Handiness? To be sure, Heidegger tries to accommodate this concern by distinguishing *Seiendes* from *Sein*, the ontic from the

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<sup>18</sup> This term is usually translated as ‘references’. I prefer ‘instrumental relations’ here to avoid confusion with the more common semantic notion of reference.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kant’s definition of the world as the ‘sum total of all appearances’ (Kant 1983a 336, 408 [B 391, 446]). Due to his rejection of basic subject-object opposition, Heidegger would deny that determining the world as experience entails the possibility of external world scepticism (cf. IV.4 below).

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger’s frequent talk of how things appear to us ‘zumeist und zunächst’ might appear to support this idea. But note that this locution usually indicates how things strike us, *inadequately*, as inauthentic Dasein.

ontological: 'That which is [*Seiendes*] is independently of experience, knowledge and grasping through which it is disclosed, discovered and determined. Being [*Sein*], however, "is" only in [*Dasein*'s] understanding' (SZ 183; cf. 212, 230). What this means, I suggest, is that although what is natural does not depend causally (ontically) on understanding, to talk of what is natural *determinately*, e.g. as natural entities, depends (ontologically) on a perspective of individuation and hence on understanding. This would explain Heidegger's objection to the intelligibility of Things being 'in themselves' (SZ 75 f.) and his suggestion that what it is to be an entity with properties requires an account of how they are (initially) encountered. Yet there is also a quite subtle sense in which the distinction between Thingness and Handiness can be upheld ontologically. For Heidegger plausibly claims that any awareness of the properties of Things (including natural entities) results from their being somehow involved in human practices, and that this involvement constitutes an addition to or modification of their way of being, such that (in Heidegger's terms) Things of which we are aware will always have an Equipmental aspect to their being (SZ 70). In other words, 'nature' can be known only through human practices, which themselves modify its mode of being to that of Handiness. Nevertheless, whether or not Heidegger can satisfactorily deal with natural entities is not of immediate importance to his conception of language.<sup>21</sup> For linguistic entities (e.g. words, sentences) are clearly materially present entities which (nevertheless) have an irreducible ontological dependence on the way they are experienced as being. This fact, without yet implying anything about the extent to or the way in which the Thingness/Handiness distinction might apply to language, renders problems specific to natural entities irrelevant.

It might also be wondered whether Equipment and Things really comprise distinct modes of individuation: Isn't what an entity 'is for' a determinate property, so that to grasp it as Equipment is already to grasp it as a Thing? It will be most convenient to consider this difficulty, the basis of the distinction between Thingness and Handiness, later in discussing Heidegger's view of predicative Statements. But it is worth noting both its motivation and what is at stake. Heidegger is resisting an overtheoreticization of basic human experience according to which explicit awareness

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<sup>21</sup> I think Carman (2003, 155-203) is generally right to emphasize what he calls Heidegger's 'ontic realism' about natural entities. Nonetheless, in the final chapter I argue that Heidegger's principal aim was to eliminate the polar opposition between realism and idealism by criticizing their shared subject-object opposition.

of the properties of enviroing entities is required to use them practically. And his distinction is surely based on a genuine phenomenological feature. After all, one can hammer in nails without knowing how much the hammer weighs or what it is made of; burn wood without a degree in organic chemistry; build stone huts without geological expertise etc. The question is whether such differences can be accounted for simply by saying that practice ordinarily requires less knowledge than corresponding theory or expertise, but knowledge of the same kind, or whether a different and distinct kind of knowing – something akin to Ryle’s ‘knowing how’ – is involved.<sup>22</sup>

Heidegger’s discussions of language are embedded in the stratified account of the development of Significance into articulate forms of expression which he offers as an analysis of the ‘existential constitution of “the there”’ in *SZ* §§28-34. Since *Dasein* is its respective ‘there’ (*ist selbst je sein “Da”*) and ‘*Dasein is its disclosedness*’ (*SZ* 132 f.), these sections amount to an analysis of disclosure – where ‘disclosure’ is the term Heidegger generally uses in talking about the apprehension of the world. Being ‘disclosed’ encompasses two principal aspects – being taken to matter, paradigmatically to humans, and being in some way comprehended – reflected in Heidegger’s identification of ‘Affectedness’ and ‘Understanding’ as general ontological features of human being (which he calls ‘*existentiales*’). Heidegger’s talk of ‘Affectedness’ (*Befindlichkeit*) is supposed to convey the first aspect: i.e. *that Dasein finds itself* in the world and that it constitutively, and pre-reflectively, feels or ‘finds itself’ *somehow*.<sup>23</sup> Correspondingly, Heidegger suggests that this feature of disclosure has a specific function in that various modes of Affectedness – especially ‘anxiety’ – reveal *Dasein* to itself, as mattering to itself, by presenting it as the ‘entity

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ryle’s (1949, 25 ff.) distinction between dispositional ‘knowing how’ and propositional ‘knowing that’. Incidentally, given Ryle’s early awareness and eventual adoption of many of Heidegger’s views (cf. Murray 1973), it is plausible that Ryle’s distinction was influenced by Heidegger’s view of purposive and predicative awareness (see also III.4.(ii) below).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *PGZ* 352. In German, *Befindlichkeit* is to capture ‘daß es sich [...] in seiner Geworfenheit befindet’ (‘that it finds itself in its thrownness’; *SZ* 135) and ‘wie es sich (dabei) befindet’ (roughly: how *Dasein* finds it to be the way it is). There is no satisfactory translation of this term, rendered variously as ‘state of mind’, ‘moodness’, ‘situatedness’, or ‘attunement’ etc. ‘Affectedness’ highlights the second sense of *Dasein*’s mattering to itself (cf. *SZ* 12), but has the disadvantage of not simultaneously suggesting *Dasein*’s factual thrownness in the way the German term does.

which is answerable to its being'.<sup>24</sup> Heidegger's use of the familiar term 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) is somewhat idiosyncratic, distinguished by three features from both the (Kantian) discursive 'faculty of concepts' and Heidegger's contemporaries' debates about the distinction between understanding and explanation, supposedly reflecting the respective methodologies of the humanities and sciences.<sup>25</sup> First, for Heidegger, Understanding is concerned with that 'for the sake of which' Dasein exists (its *Worumwillen*; SZ 143). By this he means that Understanding pertains not to entities as such, but to the 'projected possibility' or 'project' as which Dasein lives (SZ 144, 145). Thus Understanding is purposive with regard to human aims, rather than to cosmic teleological constants, and it is in relation to such aims that entities encountered in the environment are potentially useful or expedient. In Heidegger's words, the 'primary "for what" is a for-the-sake-of-which. [...], the "sake for which" always concerns the being of *Dasein*' (SZ 84). Second, Understanding is holistic, encompassing the 'entire basic constitution of being-in-the-world' (SZ 144; cf. 152). Third, unlike a 'plan', Heidegger tells us, Understanding entails no 'thematic' grasp of the possibilities it addresses (SZ 145). By 'thematization' he means an 'articulation of the understanding of being', a 'delimitation of the area of subject matter' that prefigures the concepts appropriate to the relevant entities and befits this subject matter to 'objectivizing' scientific enquiry (SZ 363). Thus, on Heidegger's view, 'Understanding' refers to a *purposive, holistic and inarticulate* (hence pre-objective) grasp of the world, with disclosure combining this overall sense of purpose (Understanding) with a general sense of mattering (Affectedness).

Heidegger contrasts this overall sense of purpose, the 'pre-structure of Understanding', with 'the development of Understanding', as a level or stage within disclosure at which 'the structure of *something as something*' arises.<sup>26</sup> Heidegger calls

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<sup>24</sup> SZ 134. This is put more forcefully in the earlier draft of SZ: 'Affectedness is the genuine way of being Dasein, of possessing oneself as discovered, the manner in which Dasein is itself its there' (PGZ 354).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Kant 1983a, 202 [B 199]. – Heidegger distances himself explicitly from the debate over the distinction of understanding and explanation at SZ 143. For a survey of this debate cf. Schnädelbach 1983, 138-171.

<sup>26</sup> SZ 151, 148, 149. – 'Something as something' is the only idiomatic rendering of 'Etwas als Etwas' in English, which is slightly unfortunate given Heidegger's emphatic distinction between Equipment and Things. The general point he is making concerns the individuation of what is understood (whether as Equipment or Things).



this level or stage of disclosure ‘Auslegung’, the ‘setting out’, of what is understood.<sup>27</sup> Such Setting-out is the process in which features within Understanding become individuated ‘as’ a such-and-such, and it is with this move that differences between entities are to become expressly or ‘explicitly understood’.<sup>28</sup> Two points are worth noting about the relationship between Understanding and Setting-out. First, there is an important difference in that whereas Understanding pertains to, is of, projected possibilities or aims, Setting-out concerns the entities addressed. Thus Heidegger is claiming that entities are only individuated (in disclosure) in relation to a presupposed horizon of purpose, no matter how vague the latter may initially be. A corollary of this, second, is that the way entities are picked out in Setting-out and the concepts thus developed are constrained by the purposive projection of Understanding (SZ 150). Nonetheless, while always ‘grounded in Understanding’ (SZ 148), it is important that Setting-out is to occur in different modes, distinguished by what they respectively take entities to be, as being, i.e. in their sense of ‘as-ness’. In particular, Heidegger distinguishes two modes of Setting-out, corresponding to the difference between Equipment and Things. To begin with he foregrounds ‘circumspective’ Setting-out, which individuates entities *as* Equipment – i.e. purposively, according to what they are for.<sup>29</sup> But §33 further identifies predicative statements as a ‘derivative’ mode of Setting-out: it is in ‘predicating articulation’ that entities are individuated *as* Things, in terms of determinate properties (SZ 155, 158).

This analysis is given a further, and potentially problematic, twist by the claim that Affectedness and Understanding are ‘equiprimordially determined’ by a further ontological structure that forms the ‘existential-ontological foundation of language’ (SZ 133, 160). Heidegger calls this *Rede*, defining it as ‘the articulation of intelligibility’ (SZ 161). For reasons that will emerge in the sequel, I want to avoid the common translations of the term ‘Rede’ as ‘Discourse’ or ‘Talk’ and will instead,

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<sup>27</sup> This is usually rendered as ‘intepretation’. However, ‘setting out’ gets closer to the literal sense of ‘laying out’ in ‘Auslegung’ and avoids potential confusion with Heidegger’s own term ‘Interpretation’ which he applies only to reflective theoretical activity (e.g. SZ 130, 357).

<sup>28</sup> SZ 149. It is no coincidence that the term usually rendered as ‘explicit’ (*ausdrücklich*) also suggests the use of an expression (*Ausdruck*). The usual rendition, which is constrained by the use of ‘expression’ to render (*sich*) *aussprechen*/(*Hinaus*)*gesprochenheit* (e.g. SZ 28; 161, 220), somewhat obscures Heidegger’s distinction between being ‘spoken out’ or verbally performed and explicitness or having an expression for (cf. on this Macquarrie/Robinson 1962, 190n).

<sup>29</sup> Their ‘*Um-zu*’ or ‘*Wozu*’. As Heidegger puts it, to the question of what a certain entity is, circumspective setting out responds ‘it is to ...’ (SZ 149). – ‘Circumspection’, ‘*Umsicht*’, is Heidegger’s term for the kind of understanding that guides practical action (cf. SZ 69). This presumably alludes to the Aristotelian practical reason, or *φροσύνησις*, which he also translates as ‘*Umsicht*’ (*Dilthey* 255; *Soph* 21).

following Heidegger's definition, use the term 'Articulacy'.<sup>30</sup> The reference to 'intelligibility', glossed as the 'significant whole' (*Bedeutungsganze*), establishes the link with the notion of 'Significance' discussed above.<sup>31</sup> Heidegger characterizes Articulacy in terms of four 'constitutive elements': (a) that which is being talked about or referred to (*Worüber*); (b) what is said, the words uttered or written (*Geredetes*); (c) communication (*Mitteilung*), by which Heidegger means the sharing of disclosure, i.e. of Affectedness and Understanding, in the public space; (d) intimation (*Bekundung*), that which Dasein reveals of itself in performing linguistic acts (SZ 161-2). Against this background Heidegger presents language (*Sprache*) merely as the performance, outward manifestation, or 'spokenness of Articulacy'.<sup>32</sup> Thus presented, the public use of signs might seem little more than an accidental accretion to the ontological structure of Articulacy which is to articulate the meanings or 'significations' (*Bedeutungen*) of words: 'divided up in Articulating articulation [*redenden Artikulation*]', '[i]ntelligibility's whole of signification *advenes to the word* [*kommt zu Wort*]. Words accrue to the significations' (SZ 161).

The result is a puzzle as to where language fits into Heidegger's overall picture. Story A, so to speak, is an apparently straightforward account of the articulation of disclosure through different levels of 'originality', from inarticulate Understanding, through Setting-out as Equipment, and finally to Setting-out as Things (§§28-33). Yet there is also Story B: for in claiming that Articulacy is 'equiprimordial' with Affectedness and Understanding Heidegger seems also to suggest that linguistic meanings are articulated independently of, and indeed prior to, any form of Setting-out. Thus 'intelligibility', he now assures us, is 'already divided-up [*gegliedert*] prior to appropriating Setting-out', such that Articulacy 'already underlies Setting-out and [the predicative] Statement' (SZ 161). The puzzle therefore results from what appears to be a basic tension between these two stories: viz. whereas Story A apparently assimilates language to a nonlinguistic account of meaning, Story B seems to imply that all articulate understanding is linguistically structured.

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<sup>30</sup> Briefly: Historically 'Discourse' tends to suggest a link with predicative awareness. According to Kant (1983b, 205), for example, 'the specific nature of our understanding consists in thinking of everything discursively, i.e. through concepts, consequently also through nothing but predicates'.

<sup>31</sup> The link with Understanding (*Verstehen*) is also reflected in Heidegger's talk of *Verständlichkeit* ('intelligibility') as what is 'articulated in Understanding disclosing' (SZ 151, cf. 161).

<sup>32</sup> Literally the 'spoken-out-ness' (*[Hin]Ausgesprochenheit*), the state of having been pronounced (SZ 161, 167), though the comments of SZ 168 f. imply that this is to encompass written, as well as oral use of signs.

The tension between these two stories relate generates two significant difficulties in understanding the role Heidegger supposes language to have in disclosure. First, his conception of language might seem undecided as to whether language plays a constitutive role in disclosure. For according to Story A Understanding and Setting-out (and perhaps Articulacy) look like nonlinguistic feats, such that language has only a peripheral role. Hence, in Guignon's (1983, 118) view, there is 'clearly the intimation that there could be a fully articulated sense of the world [...] prior to or independent of the mastery of language'. Yet, quite apart from the intrinsic difficulties of such a view, this seems to be inconsistent with the role Heidegger attributes to language in setting up the everyday ('inauthentic') understanding of historically situated Dasein.<sup>33</sup> However, second, if language is conceded to have a constitutive role in everyday disclosure, Story A's foundational hierarchy appears to collapse. For Heidegger's identification of language (as *Gerede*, 'idle talk'; SZ 167) with Articulacy's 'everyday way of being', together with his claim that Articulacy is 'equiprimordial' with Understanding and Affectedness, seems to imply that language already pervades Understanding and so underlies all Setting-out. Yet if, as one would suppose, the use of language entails both identifying entities as such-and-such and saying things about them, its correlate Articulacy (cf. (a) and (b) above) would implant these capacities at the most basic level of the analysis, thus rendering obscure both Heidegger's general claims about Setting-out and his view that purposive or equipmental Setting-out is basic.

Contributing to all these difficulties is obscurity as to what exactly Articulacy is supposed to be and in what sense it is the 'existential-ontological foundation of language'. Part of the answer is that Heidegger uses the word 'Articulacy' (*Rede*) to translate the Greek λόγος.<sup>34</sup> The ambiguity of the latter between language and reason would facilitate the claim that a discursive capacity or abilities (reason) is a necessary condition for linguistic phenomena and that language, as the public use of signs, is but an accidental manifestation of this faculty. But this cannot suffice. For since Heidegger already defines Articulacy as public (cf. (c) above) it is not clear that this

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<sup>33</sup> SZ §35; see section 3 below. Hence Guignon's (1983, 117 f.) suggestion that SZ remains 'torn between two incompatible views of the nature of language' which he terms the 'instrumentalist' and 'constitutive' views. Lafont interprets SZ similarly as exhibiting an inchoate recognition of the constitutive function of language that was to mature and to overcome the instrumental view fully only in Heidegger's later writings (cf. Lafont 2001, 11).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. SZ 32; *Logik*, 2, 3, 6, 7; PGZ 364.

captures anything sufficiently distinct from language to function as its ‘foundation’.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, obscurity in the notion of Articulacy surely reflects a tension between two desiderata Heidegger is trying to respect. As previously observed, Story A suggests thinking of language as acquiring significance in the same way as other entities (such as hammers) might, i.e. as continuous with other meaningful phenomena. Conversely, Story B suggests that linguistic articulation has a specific form – being about something, and saying something of it (cf. (a) and (b) above) – that underlies all explicit understanding. In attempting to disambiguate the notion of Articulacy a key question is therefore whether these two desiderata, the continuity and specificity of language, can be reconciled within Heidegger’s picture.

I think it is fair to claim that Heidegger exhibits no awareness of the difficulties just outlined. Perhaps because they do not arise when his view is properly construed, perhaps because they did not occur to him.<sup>36</sup> Be this as it may, in the following I want to argue that these three difficulties can be resolved and both desiderata respected within Heidegger’s conception. To do this, it is necessary first to consider Heidegger’s analysis of ‘Statements’ as a derivative mode of Setting-out.

(ii) *The heterogeneity of sentences*: Heidegger defines Statements (*Aussagen*) in terms of three features (SZ 154 f.): Statements *point out* (*aufzeigen*) features of the world, allowing entities to be grasped as they in themselves are; their ‘mode of pointing out’, as *predication*, makes what is (already) manifest ‘explicitly manifest in its determination’; finally, Statements are *communicative* acts of ‘allowing to be seen’ (*Mitsehenlassen*), i.e. they consist in the public use of language.<sup>37</sup> As the title of §33 indicates, Heidegger considers Statements to be a ‘derivative’ form of Setting-out, involving a change in what he calls the ‘as-structure’ – i.e. in the way we are expressly or explicitly aware of what is understood – from the ‘hermeneutic as’ to the ‘apophantic as’.<sup>38</sup> This is to consist of a transition from Handiness to Thingness that ‘first opens access to something like properties’, to ‘the what’ or ‘predicating

<sup>35</sup> With some justice Lafont (2001, 67; cf. 67-73) discerns a ‘doomed effort to conceive the phenomenon of “articulation” as categorially distinct from language as a system of signs’ in order to treat Dasein as a transcendental medium.

<sup>36</sup> After all, as Heidegger coyly concedes in *US* (93), ‘Maybe it is the basic deficiency of the book *Being and Time* that I ventured too far too early’.

<sup>37</sup> As Heidegger puts it, ‘spoken-out-ness’ (*Ausgesprochenheit*) belongs to the Statement – this being the same locution as he uses in defining language (SZ 161).

<sup>38</sup> SZ 158. Cf. 149, where as-structure is characterized as the expressness or explicitness of what is understood (‘*Ausdrücklichkeit des Verstandenen*’).

articulation' of the entity concerned, a transition in which the entity is 'cut off' from the 'instrumental relations [*Verweisungsbezüge*] of Significance' (SZ 158, 155, 158). So in Heidegger's terms, the use of Statements embodies a transition from circumspective to predicative Setting-out, from awareness of entities as Equipment to awareness of entities as Things, from individuation in terms of purpose to individuation in terms of properties.

It is important to be clear as to what this transition is to involve. The crux of Heidegger's view is effectively that purposive awareness of entities is basic in the process of Setting-out. So the central thought is not only that purposive awareness of Equipment is importantly different from properties-based awareness of Things, but that the latter presupposes the former (and not vice versa). The transition from the hermeneutic-as to the apophantic-as thus corresponds to a change in the basis of individuation of entities from purposive expediency to their properties. In an important sense it is also a move towards objective knowledge: For although Heidegger would insist that Equipmental awareness is direct awareness of entities, such awareness – of what they are for (cf. SZ 149) – is clearly relative to particular ends. Conversely, the point of emphasizing that instrumental relations are 'cut off' is that predicative awareness entails liberation from such relativity to particular ends. This provides a minimal sense to Heidegger's distinction between properties and expediency (*Dienlichkeit*; SZ 83), and makes clear why this distinction is not collapsed by the objection, mentioned above, that 'being for ...' is a property. For whereas the expediency of entities (as Equipment) is purpose-relative, the properties of entities (as Things) are purpose-independent. Incidentally, it is important here, as elsewhere, not to be taken in by the rhetorical colouring in Heidegger's talk of 'derivativeness', 'levelling off', 'suppression' etc. (SZ 158). For predicative awareness is clearly an extension of purposive awareness, gained by tracking the (objective) properties of entities over variations in the perspective of interests in which they are understood.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, this should not be taken to imply that purposive awareness can simply be disregarded as philosophically irrelevant. As Heidegger is emphasizing, to the extent that predicative awareness is based on

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<sup>39</sup> In this respect Heidegger's view parallels Dewey's pragmatist and relational conception of objective knowledge for which 'The object is an abstraction' that 'designates selected relations of things which [...] are constant within the limits practically important' (Dewey 1988, 190, cf. also 175 f.).

generalizations over varying contexts of use, it necessarily presupposes, i.e. is founded in, purposive understanding.

The fact that he both explicitly discusses them and identifies them as linguistic communication might give the impression that Heidegger thinks of predicative statements as paradigmatic of linguistic phenomena. In fact, as hinted by the label 'derivative', nothing could be further from the case, and Heidegger opposes the idea that theoretical predicative statements are a model for understanding the functioning of language. This can be seen in the following passage – one of cardinal importance to understanding Heidegger's conception of language in *SZ*:

Between interpretation still completely enveloped in concerned understanding and the extreme countercase of a theoretical Statement about some Thing [*Vorhandenes*] there is a multitude of intermediate steps: Statements about occurrences in the environment, accounts of the Handy [*Zuhandenes*], 'reports on situations', recording and registering 'facts of the matter', describing a state of affairs, recounting what has happened. These 'sentences' cannot be reduced to theoretical statements without essentially distorting their sense. They, like theoretical statements themselves, have their 'origin' in circumspective interpretation. (*SZ* 158; cf. *Logik* 156n.)

This passage makes clear that Heidegger's claims about the foundational role of purposive (circumspective) awareness includes language. In particular it implies that the difference between hermeneutic and apophantic as-ness means that different kinds of sentences<sup>40</sup> cannot be assimilated to predicative Statements without 'essentially distorting their sense'. Language use, Heidegger is here claiming, can be an expression of Equipmental awareness at one extreme, of predicative awareness at the other, and of a whole range of intermediate steps.

This has several important implications. First, it means that the distinction between the hermeneutic and apophantic is to cut across, rather than coincide with, that between the linguistic and nonlinguistic. In other words, rather than paralleling the latter distinction, the delimitation between purposive and predicative awareness falls within language use. Second it highlights that what Heidegger calls predicative 'Statements' have a point distinguishing them from other uses of language. To borrow Taylor Carman's (2003, 211) fitting term, their use comprises 'overtly demonstrative practices': 'a kind of exhibiting or showing', the public letting-be-seen of determinations, that must be understood as 'a mode of practical comportment, a doing'. Yet at the same time Heidegger here emphasizes that not all language use is

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<sup>40</sup> Sic.: Heidegger's use of scare quotes here ('sentences') is due to the ambiguity of the German 'Satz' between 'sentence' and 'proposition' qua logical judgement. The point of the scare quotes is precisely to express the claim that sentences of the kind listed are not (predicative) judgements.

of this type, that much use of language is not as such an act of exhibiting or showing, but is simply immersed or embedded in other actions. And whereas it is true that for Heidegger signs serve generally to draw attention to the environing world (cf. *SZ* 79 f.), he clearly also distinguishes between ‘overtly demonstrative practices’ and practices in which what might be called ‘embedded showing’ occurs. For example, while drawing attention to the environing world, car indicators function for Heidegger at the level of practical responses and Equipmental understanding. Rather than having the *point* of ‘exhibiting or showing’ in the way ‘Statements’ do, their showing is embedded in and subordinate to the ends of other actions.<sup>41</sup> This might lead one to think of Heidegger’s Statements as a kind of speech act, and that the above passage might better have deployed the distinction between the speech act of assertion and use of a declarative sentence. However, it would be wrong to think that Heidegger’s general point is about the different kinds of act that a sentence can be used to perform, i.e. about illocution.<sup>42</sup> Rather, the distinction he is making would prevail even if all the sentences referred to were both declarative in form and assertoric in force, since it concerns the kind of content involved in the use of sentences. The claim is not simply (and trivially) that the content of sentences can vary, but that the *kind* of content sentences express is heterogeneous: that language use can be linked with purposive awareness, properties-based awareness, or any admixture of the two.

It should also be noted that, though they do not coincide, the distinctions between the hermeneutic/apophantic and nonlinguistic/linguistic are not orthogonal. For Heidegger’s treatment of Statements as both a mode of Setting-out and linguistic introduces an asymmetry in that whereas predicative statements are necessarily linguistic, language use does not necessarily involve predicative awareness. A striking consequence of this asymmetry is Heidegger’s view that even a sentence that looks exactly like a predicative statement (‘The hammer is heavy’) can be an

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<sup>41</sup> *SZ* 79. – It seems to me that Carman (2003, 234) conflates this distinction in equating ‘interpretation’ (*Auslegung*, Setting-out) with ‘demonstrative practice’, meaning that he cannot distinguish activity in which articulate understanding is manifested from activities the point of which is to draw attention to articulate understanding. Linked with this is his thesis that signs are ‘not embedded in their equipmental contexts’, that they are hence ‘conspicuous’, so that correct response to a sign cannot be to ‘simply absorb it into the purposive structure of [...] activity’ (Carman 2003, 234 f.). It seems to me that these claims are clearly at odds with *SZ* 79, in particular the point that practical attention is drawn to the environing world *without* the sign itself being conspicuous (or ‘stared at’ as a ‘showing Thing’).

<sup>42</sup> Though Heidegger does elsewhere make the Aristotelian point that not all sentences concern truth (*SZ* 32; cf. Aristotle 1938, 121 [17a5]).

‘expression’ of ‘concernful deliberation’ without being a predicative judgement.<sup>43</sup> In fact, in Heidegger’s view, the use of a sentence that is predicative in form is in itself neither necessary nor sufficient for attributing predicative awareness to its speaker. Not only, as he puts it, can one not infer the lack of interpretation (Setting-out) from the ‘lack of words’; equally ‘circumspectively *spoken-out*’ interpretation is ‘not necessarily a [predicative] Statement in the defined sense’ (SZ 157). Hence the possibility – on which (as will be seen below) Heidegger relies in his conception of ‘idle talk’ – that language can be bound up in the constitution of everyday understanding without entailing (full) awareness of its predicative import. Put another way, Heidegger’s view is that, although perhaps symptomatic, the use of predicatively structured language is not criterial for the presence of predicative awareness.

(iii) *Linguistic and nonlinguistic articulation*: To see how this affects interpretation of the notion of Articulacy, it is helpful to recall the tension between Story A’s apparently nonlinguistic picture and Story B’s intimation that linguistic structure pervades all understanding of the world. This tension has given rise to two approaches to the notion of Articulacy. The first, the ‘linguistic model’ takes Articulacy ‘as something very closely bound up, if not indeed identical, with language’; the second, the ‘pragmatic model’ concentrates on Heidegger’s characterization of Articulacy as the ‘articulation of intelligibility’, seeing it as applying to any differential behaviour and so not essentially linguistic.<sup>44</sup> Given this alternative, it seems to me that the linguistic model must be preferred, since a specific link with language is not only suggested by the introduction of Articulacy as the ‘existential-ontological foundation of language’ (SZ 160), but clearly signalled by its characterization in terms of ‘what is said’ (*Geredetes*).<sup>45</sup> In this light Articulacy seems best thought of as a generic characterization of linguistic ability as comprising,

<sup>43</sup> ‘kann einer besorgenden Überlegung Ausdruck geben’ (SZ 360 f., cf. 157).

<sup>44</sup> The above distinction is Carman’s (2003, 221, 228; cf. 220-232), identifying Guignon (1983) as a representative of the linguistic model. The pragmatic model is found in Dreyfus (1991, 215 ff.) and Blattner (1999).

<sup>45</sup> Seeing the linguistic model as too narrow and – given the need to distinguish expressive from other features of action – the pragmatic model as too broad, Carman (2003, 234) interprets Discourse (Articulacy) as ‘the normativity specific to interpretation’, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic. Whatever the independent virtues of this approach to expressive phenomena, it is difficult to square with Heidegger’s unambiguously linguistic definition. – Alternatively ‘what is said’ might be taken to invoke a notion of propositional content, but in that case the linguistic-pragmatic distinction seems to have no point (see also below page 72).



according to Heidegger's four-point definition, the ability of an agent to pick out something referred to, to say something of that referent, to say it in the public domain, and simultaneously to express itself.<sup>46</sup> Indeed it is perhaps strange that the pragmatic model should have been proposed. What motivates it is the possibility of nonlinguistic behaviour exhibiting an articulate grasp of the world, such as making and understanding gestures, but also any number of bodily actions (swimming, looking for shelter from the rain, lighting a fire etc.) and goal-directed animal behaviour (e.g. hunting, mating rituals, nest building).<sup>47</sup> Many such behaviours could be plausibly accounted for in a language-independent manner by Heidegger's Story A. However, if this is to be consistent with his claim that Articulacy is equiprimordial with Understanding and Affectedness, it would seem that Articulacy cannot be essentially linguistic, just as the pragmatic model claims.

The crucial question at this point is: in what way does Story B imply that articulate behaviour is 'linguistically structured'? Or more precisely: which features of Articulacy seem to introduce linguistic structure to all Setting-out? Clearly it is the first two features – (a) that something is talked about, and (b) that something is said. However, it is important that nothing in Heidegger's characterization (SZ 161) aligns either of these features to either circumspensive or predicative Setting-out, or to a grasp of entities as Equipment or Things. The reason for this, I propose, is that (a) and (b) are intended to apply to both purposive and properties-based understanding. In other words, as suggested by the above passage from SZ 158, the notion of Articulacy is itself subject to the distinction between Things and Equipment so that it could be said to have different 'modes' (as SZ 167, 269 suggest). Rather than being bound to a univocal notion of content, (a) and (b) should then be taken as common characteristics of the different kinds of sense expressed by sentences.<sup>48</sup>

This proposal is not without difficulties. For example, it does not obviously free Story B of the problematic implication that all articulate behaviour is language-dependent. Whether or not it does depends on how Heidegger's claim that Articulacy is 'equiprimordial' with Affectedness and Understanding is construed. For instance,

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<sup>46</sup> Put this way, 'Articulacy' might seem to involve subjective psychological states of the kind Heidegger intends not to discuss. But the above description is intended (in Wittgensteinian fashion) as a characterization of the public phenomenology of this ability.

<sup>47</sup> For an illuminating discussion of tigers' purposive behaviour cf. chapter 5 of Okrent 1988, especially 137, 147, 148.

<sup>48</sup> The suggestion is thus that the 'content' of Heidegger's 'Rede' can be nonpredicative, rather than bound to the traditional discourse-concepts-predicates triad (cf. footnote 30 and section 2.(ii)).

whether Articulacy is to be necessarily or contingently involved in nonlinguistic articulate actions. Or whether language is supposed to comprise a subset of articulate behaviours which, although stratified into purposive and predicative levels of Setting-out, is ‘equiprimordially’ characterized by Affectedness, Understanding and Articulacy. It seems to me that Heidegger’s position is best read in this latter way. Acknowledging the possibility of articulate nonlinguistic behaviours would certainly cohere with his claims that purposive articulation is the most basic form of Setting-out and that such articulation is possible only for creatures with an overall sense of Understanding.<sup>49</sup> Yet it would also lead one to expect a distinction at the level of Setting-out between Discursive and non-Discursive forms of articulation/expression which Heidegger apparently neglects.<sup>50</sup> Though such a distinction is perhaps hinted at by the organization of §§28-34, particularly its late consideration of Articulacy in §34, I will not pursue these claims here, either exegetically or otherwise, since the status of nonlinguistic behaviours is peripheral to Heidegger’s conception of language

Instead I want to argue that this view of Articulacy – as bearing on a (linguistic) subset of articulate behaviour – is recommended by the way it deals with the two difficulties outlined above. Regarding the first of these, the apparent peripheralization of language, it is far from clear that Heidegger does in fact intimate that there could be a ‘fully articulated sense of the world’ without language use. For he thinks that language is already used in Equipmental Setting-out, which in turn is a precondition for the predicative Setting-out that presumably belongs to ‘full articulation’. Thus even Story A, as I called it, does not commit Heidegger to illicit reliance on nonlinguistic structures. Moreover, by treating (predicative) Statements as ‘communication’ Heidegger implies that predicative judgement depends on language use. Indeed, independently of Heidegger’s stated commitments, his view of the relationship between Equipment and Thingness seems to require this. For getting beyond the immediacy of the expediency of individual entities to particular ends and attaining ends-independent predicative generalizations presumably requires symbolic representation of entities so as to identify them in a stable way over variation in the

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<sup>49</sup> On the latter see, for example, Dreyfus’s classic discussion of the ‘situational character of relevance’ and the difficulties this poses – the so-called ‘frame problem’ – to Artificial Intelligence research (Dreyfus 1992 257, cf. 256-282).

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Story-A-appearances to the contrary, it seems to me that strictly speaking Heidegger does not give an account of articulate nonlinguistic behaviours. That is, although Story A provides the means for doing so, Story B means that SZ itself concerns only linguistically contoured disclosure.

functional context.<sup>51</sup> It also seems at least plausible to suggest that organizing the attribution of properties requires the complex but finite kind of syntactic framework that linguistic representation embodies.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore difficult, even without considering the role of *Gerede* ('idle talk'), to see Heidegger as denying that language has a constitutive role in disclosing the world. Nonetheless, what remains importantly correct about this objection is that Heidegger is silent as to *how* language might do constituting work.<sup>53</sup>

The second difficulty was that Heidegger's foundational hierarchy appears to collapse once language is conceded to have a constitutive role in everyday disclosure. For it appeared that Articulacy implants 'linguistic structure' at the same level as Understanding and Affectedness, implying that these are inherently articulated and thus undermining Heidegger's account of Setting-out. This difficulty can be dissipated by putting together three thoughts. First, the recognition that Equipmental Setting-out is to be construed not as a level of prelinguistic articulation, but as a basic purposive articulation of Understanding potentially linked with linguistic expression. Second, since Articulacy is itself subject to the purposive-predicative distinction, i.e. is structurally equivocal, there is no implication that, for example, predicative structure is projected back into or prior to purposive awareness via the notion of Articulacy. Third, Heidegger's view of the hermeneutic-apophantic transition implies, indeed explicitly allows, that the use of linguistic forms indicating predicative structure does not entail predicative awareness. Whereas the first thought clarifies that Story A does not exclude language, the latter two make clear that the notion of Articulacy does not short-circuit the stratified picture of Story A. The result is that the two stories A and B can be seen as complementary rather than in conflict – just as Heidegger seems to have supposed.

Nevertheless, assuming the above, what kind of Articulate structure (*Gliederung*; SZ 161) is supposed to inhere in Understanding and Affectedness?

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<sup>51</sup> As Humboldt (1995, 48 f.) points out, linguistic representation, in his view an exteriorization of the mental, objectifies and enables us to gain reflective distance towards our thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Okrent (1988, 147-149) further proposes a verificationist argument to the effect that without the use of language there would be no evidential basis to distinguish predicative awareness from purposive awareness. Although this is in itself plausible and would support the above claims, it seems to me rather generous to attribute this argument to Heidegger.

<sup>53</sup> While Heidegger's later thinking might be seen as emphasizing the 'constitutive' function of language, it is not clear to me that, for example, his accounts of poetic experience of language (US 157-216) helpfully *elucidate* – as opposed to simply encouraging a pious attitude towards – the supposed constitutive function of language.

Although at one point mentioning the need to ask about ‘the basic forms’ of an ‘articulation of what can be understood altogether’, Heidegger does not address this question, suggesting only that an answer presupposes his analytic of Dasein (SZ 165 f.). However, from what has been said here two constraints can be discerned. First, given Heidegger’s claims that Articulate structure precedes Setting-out, and that Setting-out effects the individuation of entities, Articulate structure should precede individuation. Or equivalently, given the structurally equivocal nature of Articulacy, its structure should be amenable to different modes of individuation. This suggests that the Articulate structure Heidegger invokes should be thought of as differential structure, a manifold exhibiting discernible differences without being organized into units. Second, given the specific link between Articulacy and language, the structure involved should be discernable as linguistic. Although Heidegger does not elucidate this link, the Saussurean conception of linguistic structure, to be discussed in the next chapter (section 3), can be seen to meet these constraints, and can to this extent be considered to play the role of Heidegger’s Articulate structure.

In conclusion two features of the view I am attributing to Heidegger are worth highlighting. The first is the foundational function of purposive understanding. This idea is central to the hierarchical picture of structures that I have been referring to as Story A. The ultimate context for language, on this picture, is a holistic and pragmatic notion of the world as experienced, the entire nexus of instrumental relations that Heidegger calls ‘Significance’. Our grasp of this Significance reposes in a purposive, holistic, inarticulate background awareness (Understanding), which can be developed (in Setting-out) into different forms of articulate understanding. For Heidegger, as has been seen, the most basic articulations are the product of purposive understanding, individuating entities (as Equipment) in relation to specific ends. By contrast predicative understanding, which individuates entities (as Things) according to purpose-indifferent properties, is ‘derivative’ in presupposing purpose-relative Equipmental understanding as a basis of generalization. The second feature to be highlighted is that this first feature, the founding of predicative in purposive awareness, also applies to language. This is most obviously manifested in Heidegger’s treatment of both words and sentences/Statements as Equipment (SZ 161, 224) and in his polemics against treating language in terms of Things (SZ 161). This is significant in identifying SZ’s position as a pragmatist one, according to which

language is to be understood as instrumental in character. However, I have now attempted to show that, apparent tensions notwithstanding, the foundational role of the purposive is also more deeply ingrained in Heidegger's conception of language. For allowing that Articulacy is heterogeneous in the sense that it can exhibit different modes of Setting-out not only removes the apparently obvious tension between stories A and B, but also allows key difficulties to be resolved that would otherwise afflict Heidegger's conception of language. In this way subjecting the notion of Articulacy to different modes of Setting-out is the key to a consistent reading of the analysis of the disclosure presented in SZ §§28-34.

## **2. Phenomenological commitments**

Before looking more specifically at Heidegger's conception of the function of linguistic signs and linguistic competence, I want briefly to highlight several very general features of his view of language that characterize it as a phenomenological one. In doing this the point will be both to identify what is distinctive about a phenomenological conception of language in general, and to outline the ways in which such a position might potentially conflict with or complement other philosophical conceptions of language.

(i) *Language as language-in-the-world*: One such general feature is that on Heidegger's view language cannot be thought of as something with an inside-outside topology 'within which' intentional relations are *contained*. In one respect this might seem obvious, since Heidegger's (Story A) account of the structures of disclosure made language look like an altogether peripheral aspect of intentionality. However, the point applies equally if (as I have suggested) language is constitutively involved in Heidegger's Setting-out, and is better appreciated in the light of his shift away from Husserlian phenomenology. A central aspect of this shift, as previously pointed out, was Heidegger's insistence on the need for phenomenological enquiry to examine the ontology required for its own realization.<sup>54</sup> It was this requirement that led him to challenge the intelligibility of postulating transcendental subjectivity as a closed ('immanent') realm of constitution, to insist on the primacy of lived experience, and ultimately to reject basic subject-object dualism in favour of Dasein's

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. page 13 above.

essential 'being-in-the-world'. Because Dasein is a kind of historically and socially situated agency, there is no intimation that all of intentionality is 'in', or the correlate of, any one such agent. As a result, intentionality is pictured as having a *distributed* topology: rather than being contained 'within' some constituting entity, intentional relations are spread out over time and between agents. Heidegger's objections to the idea of a constituting medium must, however, be thought of as generic. For any objections bearing on the conceivability of transcendental subjectivity as a closed, fully present realm of constituted eidetic relations would apply equally to attempts to think of language in the same way. The only plausible assumption is therefore that rather than substituting language-world dualism for mind-world dualism, as some adherents of the linguistic turn appear to do, Heidegger is opposed to any such basic dualism.

A second general feature of Heidegger's approach to language – one clearly motivated by the idea of 'getting the phenomenology right' (PA) – is its *antireductionism*. This is the view that because language is essentially embedded in a broader phenomenal context, to understand what or how language is requires consideration of the processes and phenomenal relations it is involved in.<sup>55</sup> A good example of this is the idea of what might be called *phenomenal integrity*, the idea that in describing some phenomenon one must respect its character as a unified whole, which Heidegger often relies on in invoking the imagery of 'unitary' phenomena being 'shattered', 'demolished' or simply 'passed over'.<sup>56</sup>

Antireductionism is a recurrent theme in Heidegger's conception of language. In addition to the claim that analysis in terms of 'word Things' 'shatters' language, it emerges with particular clarity in his rejection of attempts to conceive of language in terms of 'symbolic forms', 'categories of meaning', or the logic of propositions (SZ 161, 163, 165). Heidegger's general point is that picking out *one* of these aspects as the 'essence of language' cannot yield a philosophically adequate understanding of language. The same tendency is at work in what I shall call *antiformalism*, a feature particularly salient in SZ's discussion of signs. Heidegger states that both the instrumental relations comprising the world and the relations between different kinds of

<sup>55</sup> This parallels Austin's (1979, 182) 'linguistic phenomenology': 'When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking not *merely* at words [...] but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena.'

<sup>56</sup> Cf. e.g. SZ 53, 161, 206, 65. The aspects of unity and completeness are combined in Heidegger's notion of 'originality' at SZ 231.

signs can be ‘easily formalized’, but that the problem with such formalizations is that they ‘basically say nothing’ as they ‘level off the phenomena to such an extent that the proper phenomenal content gets lost’ (SZ 78, 88). Incidentally, though he would object to it in the same way, Heidegger’s talk of the ‘formal’ and ‘formalization’ is not specifically directed to the now common use of this term as standing for formal-logical quantification. Rather, it relies on a general distinction between symbolic representations (forms) and their fulfilment in phenomena, roughly analogous to the Kantian contrast between empty concepts and the material of intuitions.<sup>57</sup> The point Heidegger is making is that any theory of signs focusing exclusively on formal and relational properties will yield no insight into the phenomenal basis from which its abstractions proceed, i.e. it tells us nothing about what it is actually to be or to function as a sign. Further, in concentrating on one kind of similarity, such theories constitutively disregard other differences between phenomena. So Heidegger is not denying that such a formalized conception of, e.g., semiotic phenomena can be developed. Indeed he claims this is ‘easy’. The point of his antiformalism is rather to insist that an abstract formal conception of whatever kind (e.g. semiotic, syntactic or semantic) of relationship can provide only an uninformative schematism; to be revealingly informative such a conception must be complemented by an account of what it is for those kinds of relationship to be realized in actual phenomena.

Finally it is perhaps worth highlighting that for Heidegger language’s mode of being, just as that of subjectivity, cannot be the ‘constant remaining’ (*ständiger Verbleib*; SZ 96) of Things. Rather, since phenomena are temporal in character, his insistence on spelling out the phenomenal basis of formal relationships rules out a (platonistic) picture of content as a detemporalized, static realm in which various semantic or inferential relations hold. Heidegger is thus committed to a *process view* of language rather than a *stasis view* – or in Humboldt’s terms to viewing language as an activity rather than a (finished) work.<sup>58</sup>

So Heidegger’s presentation of language in the broader context of the phenomenon of disclosure reflects a pervasive tendency in his approach, which can be summed up by

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<sup>57</sup> The distinction between the formal and fulfilment results from Heidegger’s adaptation of Husserl’s theory of meaning (cf. section 4 below).

<sup>58</sup> Emphasis on the processual character of language is the point of Humboldt’s oft cited distinction between *ergon* and *energeia*: ‘Language, grasped in its real essence, is something persistent and at every moment transient. [...] [Language] itself is not a work (*ergon*), but an activity (*energeia*). Its true definition can therefore be only a genetic one’ (Humboldt 1995, 36).

saying it is fundamental to his picture that language, just as Dasein, is to be understood in terms of its embeddedness in the world, so to speak, as *language-in-the-world*. These features, I suggest, are palpably motivated by Heidegger's commitment to the need for philosophical views to reflect lived experience accurately, i.e. to phenomenological accountability. With this in mind, however, they can be taken as bringing out a pattern of general commitments that should characterize a phenomenological conception of language: namely, that language has no inside and outside, is embedded in or distributed over the world, and should be understood non-reductively, without formalism, and as processual rather than static.

Suppose it were agreed that these features adumbrate the general shape a phenomenological conception of language ought to have. What of it? How might such a conception contribute to philosophical understanding of language? At this general level Heidegger, say, might be taken simply to be proposing a certain picture or a better way of seeing language. And since the way we 'picture' some phenomenon is simply shorthand for the overall way we conceive of it, to urge a particular picture in this way is clearly of some critical interest. Indeed, even at this general level Heidegger's approach can be taken to contest directly some of the more strident abstractions found in philosophy of language, e.g. forthright claims that 'a language' is a set of paired sentences and meanings, an abstract object, or essentially an internal representation conforming to 'Universal Grammar'.<sup>59</sup> It is plausible to suggest that such claims either neglect to examine the ontology required for their realization or disregard the actual or full phenomenology of language, leading to a conception of language that is at best inadequate and at worst highly misleading.

But matters are often not so clear cut, as can be illustrated by considering how Heidegger might respond to a conception of language based on predicate calculus of the kind originally due to Frege. This kind of approach, which I shall call the 'semantics approach', can reasonably be considered standard in contemporary philosophy of language. Nonetheless, it is fairly clear that Heidegger would object that in its outset the semantics approach ignores the phenomenology of language and that the conception of language it yields is a variant of formalism.<sup>60</sup> What is the

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. respectively Davies 1981, 135; George 1990, 291 – who makes the obscure, yet supposedly 'uncontroversial', claim that '[w]hen I die, my own language, being an abstract entity, will not cease to exist and will almost certainly never be possessed by anyone again'; and Chomsky 1986, 25 f.

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger consistently opposed algorithmic approaches to modelling content. Cf. e.g. *PIA* 32; *US* 263 f.; and *USIS* 24 f. – Incidentally, Heidegger was to some extent aware of Frege's work, suggesting



substance and force of such objections? Heidegger's claim is in effect that a formal or algorithmic conception of language is superficial. Suppose the means of predicate calculus could be honed to represent convincingly and comprehensively the semantics of natural languages. While allowing this to be an extraordinary technical and intellectual achievement, a Heideggerian antireductionist would presumably maintain that it fails to tell us anything about the phenomena and processes in which the use of language is embedded. However, it is not obvious that is necessarily a problem for the semantics approach, which might simply acknowledge the need Heidegger identifies and view his approach as complementary. I am not suggesting here that that would be the proper response, but simply that this possibility brings out a genuine limitation of picture-level engagement in that one needs to establish not just that pictures or approaches appear different, but that the views they yield genuinely contradict or conflict with each other. For, failing this, two apparently dissimilar approaches or conceptions may simply be providing complementary and equally correct accounts of disjunct aspects of linguistic phenomena. That is to say, picture-level engagement is not sufficiently specific to allow a properly informed judgement as to the precise relationship between, say, a phenomenological approach à la Heidegger and the semantics approach.

If the risk of degeneration into a polemical, or simply indifferent, stand-off is to be averted, a more specific kind of engagement is therefore required. The requisite focus for this, I suggest, is hinted at by Heidegger's treatment of predicative Statements as 'derivative' in virtue of their foundation in purposive understanding. Examining this claim in more detail, as I shall now do, will bring out both what is distinctive about Heidegger's position and an identifiable tension between this position and the semantics approach.

(ii) *The idea of prepredicative founding*: The philosophical poignancy of Heidegger's view of predicative statements (*Aussagen*) in *SZ* can be brought into focus by considering the parallel, more extensive discussion in his 1925/26 lectures entitled 'Logic'. In an exposition of Aristotle's *On Interpretation* Heidegger there highlights the importance of 'combination and division', or synthesis and diairesis, as a

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in a 1912 review of research in logic that Frege's importance for a 'general theory of concepts' was still to be realized. Yet later in the same text he more characteristically claims that 'logistics', or formal logic, is simply mathematics and is not 'capable of pressing forward to the actual logical problems' (*FS* 20, 42; cf. *US* 116).

precondition for the truth/falsity of propositions.<sup>61</sup> As he puts it, a ‘proposition can only be true at all [...] because qua proposition it moves *a priori within the “as”*’ (italics added; *Logik* 135). In Heidegger’s view, Aristotle had correctly recognized the need for, but failed to explicate the phenomenon of combination/division.<sup>62</sup> Just as in his discussion of signs, Heidegger allows that the ‘formal structures of “combining” and “dividing”’ can become the object of a kind of calculus or “calculation”. But here too he insists on the need to spell out the phenomenal basis of such an ‘external “theory of judgement”’ (SZ 159). Accordingly, to understand the ‘basic structure of the λόγος qua Statement’, Heidegger thinks it crucial to explicate how this a priori ‘as-ness’ – what it is for an object to be (as) that object – is constituted.<sup>63</sup> And this of course is exactly what the analytic of Dasein in SZ claims to do in highlighting the founding of the ‘apophantic-as’ in the ‘hermeneutic-as’, or of predicative in purposive awareness.

The first thing to notice here is that Heidegger’s approach to the content of predication centres on an underlying ‘prepredicative character of the as-structure’ (*Logik* 144). In this respect his position takes up a characteristic theme of the phenomenological tradition, motivated by its general commitment to antireductionism and antiformalism. For Husserl’s aim had always been to investigate the overall constitution of intentionality, and in so doing to relate logical-categorical acts to their foundation in underlying phenomena, in particular perceptual acts. And Husserl himself, most notably in *Experience and Judgement*, offers an extended account of ‘prepredicative’ structures, the aims of which closely resemble Heidegger’s.<sup>64</sup> Heidegger’s view differs markedly from Husserl’s in claiming that the prepredicative should be understood in terms of purposiveness rather than perceptual states. Thus he not only talks of ‘prepredicative [...] seeing’ of Equipment (SZ 149), but suggests that ‘so-called straightforward having-there and grasping’ of an entity is ‘not a direct grasping at all’ since this presupposes having ‘already dealt with it previously’, understanding it ‘in terms of that for which it serves’ (*Logik* 147). However, the question this section will focus on is not the substance of such claims, i.e. what the

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<sup>61</sup> Aristotle 1938, 115 [16a13]; *Logik* 140. The discussion of *Logik* 127-161 is particularly relevant to the treatment of predicative statements in §33 of SZ.

<sup>62</sup> *Logik* 141; SZ 159. Aristotle presumably thought this occurred in the ‘soul’ (Aristotle 1938, 115 [16a4]), but this can be ignored for the present purpose.

<sup>63</sup> In a phenomenon ‘which in itself is combining and dividing and lies prior to relationships between linguistic expressions and their attribution and denial’ (*Logik* 141).

<sup>64</sup> Husserl 1985, 1-230. As will be seen, Merleau-Ponty also took up this interest in the prepredicative.

prepredicative is taken to consist of (since this is addressed by subsequent chapters), but how they are to be interpreted: what does it mean to say that something is ‘prepredicative’?

The starting point in answering this is simply to observe that if propositional content is taken to be based on predication, then ‘prepredicative’ factors will be concerned with the way the content of propositions is constituted. In saying this, it should be borne in mind that Heidegger thinks that the notion of ‘content’ is arrived at only by way of abstraction, or ‘formalization’, and that it encompasses heterogeneous phenomena. In other words, what looks homogeneous at the level of propositional content may be eliding important differences in the way entities are understood. Accordingly, one might expect there to be several kinds of content-constitution process that underlie meaningful sentences. This qualification notwithstanding, the rough idea is that prepredicative factors are to effect the constitution of propositional content. However, to be more precise and to allow the relationship between a Heideggerian and the semantics approach to be explored more fully, I want to suggest that Heidegger should be understood as claiming that prepredicative factors have three defining features:

(a) *Subpropositional*: In claiming that propositional content is formed by prepredicative factors, Heidegger’s basic claim is twofold: First, he is clearly denying explanatory priority to the (‘derivative’) propositional level.<sup>65</sup> Second, he is claiming that the existence and functioning of prepredicative factors is required for, and is hence implicit in, contentful use of sentences. However, in addition, the genetic phenomenological approach he takes to the articulation of Significance leads him to focus on words, that is, on the structural components of sentences. His concern, in other words, is with factors that underlie propositional content both functionally and structurally. To reflect this dual sense of reliance I shall describe the prepredicative factors Heidegger is concerned with as subpropositional.

(b) *Subinferential*: A second feature of the prepredicative can be drawn from an aspect of the transition to predicative awareness highlighted by Robert Brandom. As he puts it, the distinctive feature of predicates relied on by Heidegger’s treatment of Statements is that ‘predicates come in inferential families’, serving to ‘codify’ the ‘inferential significances’ already grasped purposively (Brandom 1983, 402). Linking

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<sup>65</sup> See also his critique of the paradigm of propositions (Statements) in at SZ 165.

predication with inferential properties is compelling: if inferential properties correspond to propositional content and propositional content is understood in terms of predication, then predicative and inferential properties will clearly be linked. And with this move come also, as correlates of grasping inferential properties, commitment to the notion of semantic truth and the ability to engage in reasoning. But recognizing the link between predication and inference also sheds further light on the transition to properties-based awareness, which was previously interpreted minimally as involving a shift from purpose-specific to purpose-independent individuation of entities. This minimal interpretation might be challenged by arguing that purposive understanding already entails awareness of some properties. Thus in Heidegger's paradigm case Dasein must know what a hammer looks like, at least in the sense of being able to recognize hammers from non-hammers. Or in the case of language, of principal interest here, a speaker must surely have a corresponding recognitional grasp of the syntactic properties of words – their distinctness from one another and grammatical properties – in order to make use of them. What Brandom's observation adds is a constraint clarifying what it is to be aware of something in a predicative manner, or to individuate it in terms of objective properties: namely, that one be able to involve it in inferential operations, so that the 'properties' involved in predicative awareness are inferential properties.

This might initially seem to modify Heidegger's claim by restricting his talk of 'properties' to some subset 'inferential properties'. But I think this would be to misconstrue the constraint Brandom articulates. After all, in principle any property can be involved in inferences, if an agent is able to introduce them into reasoning processes. Conversely, if an agent is unable to involve some feature in inferential use, then it must be at least doubtful that he is aware of that feature as such.<sup>66</sup> Brandom's constraint thus bears not on properties as such, but on the kind of grasp agents have of them. So, if predicative awareness is taken to involve being aware of something such that it is immediately available for use in inferences, prepredicative awareness should be taken to lack this quality. Although this implies that prepredicative awareness is in some sense 'prior' to the ability to reason, it obviously does not mean that it is 'irrational' in the sense of lacking any link with inferential reasoning. Rather the

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<sup>66</sup> This should apply even if one thinks it possible to have 'implicit' grasp of properties. If such a grasp cannot be seamlessly made 'explicit' in the sense of being involved in one's reasoning, it is difficult to see what an 'implicit grasp' amounts to.

whole point of talking of a *transition* from prepredicative to predicative awareness is that, this modification notwithstanding, inferential properties are somehow determined by the prepredicative.

The second feature is therefore that the prepredicative can be described as *subinferential* in a dual sense: (a) to grasp an entity prepredicatively – in Heidegger's picture, as being 'for ...' – does not entail the ability to reason about that entity or its uses, i.e. does not entail awareness of how these relate to other beliefs or propositionally expressible commitments; (b) inferential properties are based on, and somehow shaped by prepredicative factors.

(c) *Heterologous functioning*: A third feature of the prepredicative can be approached by considering the relationship between disclosure and truth. As is well known, in *SZ* Heidegger advocates a broad and unorthodox notion of truth according to which disclosedness is understood as the 'most original phenomenon of truth' – supposedly reflecting the proper meaning of the Greek term (*ἀλήθεια*), standardly translated as 'truth' (*SZ* 220 f., 219). This view was in no doubt partly motivated by Heidegger's reading of Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which distinguishes five different ways of attaining truth, including practical wisdom and science.<sup>67</sup> But, historical considerations aside, Heidegger also had a philosophical motive for incorporating propositional truth within a broader phenomenon: Denying a basic subject-object dichotomy in favour of the notion of being-in-the-world meant the idea of being radically out of touch with the world, or with truth, makes no sense. *Dasein* is always 'in the truth' (*SZ* 221) in the sense that it is in genuine, unbreached contact with its surroundings. The difficulty, as Heidegger sees it, is instead to understand how truth is founded in the world, or how 'the roots of propositional truth reach down into the disclosedness of [purposive] Understanding' (*SZ* 223). It is not my aim here to consider the objections that have or might be made to this view as a theory of truth.<sup>68</sup> For the present purposes, however, it will be convenient to allow, in the spirit of the traditional view rejected in *SZ* §44a, that the label 'truth' should apply only to propositions and sentences. Although it was no doubt part of Heidegger's rhetorical strategy to incorporate the propositional level in a more comprehensive notion of truth qua disclosure, respecting this terminological convention in fact makes it easier to articulate an important feature of Heidegger's position. In contrast to 'truth'

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Aristotle 1934, 331 [1139b14] ff. and particularly Heidegger's 1924-5 lectures (*Soph* 14-64).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Tugendhat (1970).

Heidegger's term 'disclosure' will be taken in the following to refer to the broader phenomenon of openness to and contact with the world, and as encompassing subpropositional, propositional and suprapropositional levels.<sup>69</sup>

With this distinction between truth and disclosure in place, it becomes easier to see prepredicative and predicative factors as distinct. After all, as long as both prepredicative and predicative awareness are described in the same terms, whether disclosure or truth, it might seem that their functioning is governed by the same considerations. Yet, as has been seen, one of the principal theses of the analytic of Dasein is that this is not the case: Equipment and Things, purposive and predicative awareness, are to be distinct categories, even though the latter are somehow to depend on the former. This ambivalent relationship of both distinctness and dependency is underwritten by the thought that prepredicative and predicative awareness somehow function in different ways – they are, as I shall put it, *heterologous*.<sup>70</sup> This third feature of Heidegger's view of the prepredicative not only underlies the assumption that the predicative and prepredicative are mutually irreducible, but also gives genuine substance to idea of foundation by allowing that subpropositional elements play a role which is neither arbitrary nor reducible to their contribution to propositional truth/falsity.

Whether or not one thinks Heidegger's account satisfactory, it is clearly helpful to preserve this feature of his foundational claims by characterizing the functioning of prepredicative factors in some way other than its relation to propositional truth. In the following I will therefore talk of the prepredicative as being governed by considerations of *appropriateness*.<sup>71</sup> In addition to distinguishing prepredicative functionality from propositional truth, this has two advantages. First it avoids assuming apriori the yoke of bivalency. This allows the possibility – as is arguably more plausible – that appropriateness comes in degrees: the tone of my comments can be more or less appropriate to the situation, a tool better or worse

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<sup>69</sup> This is not intended as an exegetic claim. Nevertheless, although obviously diverging from Heidegger's position in *SZ*, it is presumably consistent with his late concession that it had been incorrect and misleading to call 'ἀλήθεια in the sense of the Clearing "truth"' (*SD* 77).

<sup>70</sup> This represents a significant difference to Husserl, who rather curiously often discerned directly corresponding features of predicative judgements in 'predicative' perception (cf. Husserl 1985, 97, 104, 111).

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger makes a corresponding move by describing Equipment in terms of 'expediency' (*Dienlichkeit*) or 'suitability' (*Geeignetheit*; *SZ* 83). However, as already noted, the distinctness of this prepredicative functionality is less easy to appreciate where expediency is treated as part of the 'original phenomenon of truth'.

suited to the job at hand etc. At the same time, second, it suggests that conditions or considerations of felicity (e.g. relative to other means, expressions) are relevant, i.e. that there is something to be said about what constitutes appropriateness or a lack thereof.

An implication of recognizing appropriateness as distinct from (propositional) truth is that a conception of the overall phenomenon of disclosure should respect both modes of functioning. An instructive attempt to do this is made by Martin Seel, who sees 'pragmatic appropriateness' and 'propositional truth' as complementarity aspects in 'disclosure of the world'. According to Seel, appropriateness – or as he calls it 'rightness' – governs our access to the world and constitutes 'domain-opening understanding of things' in practice, whereas propositional truth functions normatively, as a corrective influence on rightness, which is not itself 'a dimension of validity' (Seel 2002, 50, 61). It seems to me that Seel is right to discern both mutual irreducibility and functional complementarity between appropriateness and truth. However, despite the obvious philosophical appeal of emphasizing the corrective potential of propositional truth, his approach seems a little one-sided. For although not necessarily directed to epistemic goals or restricted in its functioning to a bivalent scheme of evaluation, pragmatic appropriateness is clearly a kind of (nonepistemic) normative requirement governing disclosure. To emphasize the corrective role of propositional truth alone would somewhat obscure Heidegger's point that Equipmental access is not accountable to epistemic standards. However, the lesson of Heidegger's analysis, I suggest, is rather that disclosure, in particular linguistic disclosure, should be thought of as genuinely multifactorial, governed by the interplay and tensions between both pragmatic and cognitive criteria.

At this point it might seem that Heidegger's prepredicative founding thesis is compounded and complicated once language is in the picture. For it might seem necessary to distinguish between prepredicative (prepredicative<sub>s</sub>) awareness of linguistic signs and prepredicative (prepredicative<sub>o</sub>) awareness of the objects referred to using these, inevitably prompting the question as to the relationship between the two. In particular it would then be tempting to wonder about inconvenient permutations such as (a) prepredicative<sub>s</sub> awareness of signs effecting predicative awareness of objects, or (b) prepredicative<sub>o</sub> awareness of objects being mediated by predicative awareness of language. In fact either of these possibilities seems

problematic: (a) implausibly suggests one could be aware of the inferentially relevant properties of an object without knowing the inferentially relevant properties of the term being used to refer to it; equally unconvincingly, (b) suggests one could be aware of the inferentially relevant properties of signs without being similarly aware of the corresponding properties of the objects to which they refer.

The intimacy of the link between predicative awareness of objects and that of signs ensures, however, that *prepredicative<sub>s</sub>* and *prepredicative<sub>o</sub>* are actually correlative. For on the one hand, the use of signs is involved in predicative thinking, since symbolic representation is required for generalized cross-purpose awareness.<sup>72</sup> Yet on the other hand, the whole point of representation is that the inferential properties signs have *qua signs* are due to what they are taken to stand for. In other words, predicative awareness of an object is possible only by using a sign that by definition shares its inferential properties. Conversely without predicative awareness of its supposed object, a sign cannot be considered to have inferential properties. As a result, our awareness of both signs *and* their supposed referents is either predicative or *prepredicative*, so that a single distinction between *prepredicative* and predicative awareness (applying correlatively to both) is all that is needed. This result, which reflects the involvement of signs in predicative awareness, is perhaps not surprising, given Heidegger's view of language as embedded in the world more generally. Indeed the temptation to think there is a philosophically important distinction between the grasp we have of language and the grasp of the world we arrive at through the use of language is perhaps due to residual dualist habits of the kind Heidegger sought to overcome.

One complication that does arise on Heidegger's picture is that whereas the use of signs is necessary for predicative awareness, he clearly does not think it sufficient. This not only reiterates the point previously encountered that the distinction between purposive and predicative awareness falls within language, rather than coinciding with the linguistic/nonlinguistic distinction, but also points to a distinctive and interesting feature of Heidegger's view in allowing that at least some language use is *prepredicative* in character. This hints at two questions to be addressed in the following chapters. First, having here clarified what claims to be

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<sup>72</sup> It might be objected that predicative awareness of objects is possible without the overt use of signs. If this is possible, it is clearly of no relevance to the relationship between signs and what they stand for.



### 3. An ambivalence about language

I now want to consider Heidegger's view of the way linguistic signs are involved in developing an articulate understanding of the world, or in his terms their disclosure function. The most general determination of this function, and hence the function of language, in *SZ* is that attributed to Articulacy. For in addition to outlining the fourfold structure, discussed above, Heidegger characterizes the general function of Articulacy – or λόγος – as 'pointing to' what is talked about so as to allow it to be 'directly seen' or 'inspected'.<sup>73</sup> This use of the term 'see' is deliberately broad and 'formalized', referring to any act of direct apprehension of features of the world (SZ 147). And while it might be thought somewhat metaphorical, such broad use is familiar from idiomatic phrases such as 'I see what ... means', 'He doesn't see it that way', etc. All the same, Heidegger's talk of 'direct' (*schlicht*) apprehension of the world, especially where the use of signs is involved, might seem paradoxical. The point of this is a contrast with inference, i.e. consciously moving from given data to corresponding conclusions, so that 'direct' awareness means noninferential awareness.<sup>74</sup> But for Heidegger 'direct' awareness also means unsevered contact with the world, having an awareness of entities or features of the world as such, rather than an awareness in which some interposed medium (e.g. language) continues to play a constitutive and potentially distortive role.<sup>75</sup>

Further insight into Heidegger's view of language in *SZ* is provided by his discussion of what he calls 'Gerede' and defines as the 'everyday way of being-in-Articulacy' (SZ 167 f.). In contrast to Heidegger's examples of hearing or reman-

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<sup>73</sup> It is 'aufweisendes Sehenlassen' or 'Vernehmenlassen': 'die Grundbedeutung von λόγος ist das Aufweisen, welches ist 'απόφανσις' or 'aufweisendes Sehenlassen'; the 'Funktion des λόγος' lies 'im schlichte Sehenlassen von etwas [...], im Vernehmenlassen des Seienden' (SZ 32, 34).

<sup>74</sup> As Austin (1962, 14-19) and Stroll (1988, 152-159, 161) have emphasized without some contrast with 'indirectness' it would make no sense to speak of 'directness'.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Heidegger's characterization of 'reine *noein*, das schlicht hinsehende Vernehmen der einfachen Seinsbestimmungen des Seienden als solchen' (SZ 33) and IV.4 below.

silent, this everyday mode of linguistic ability, as ‘spoken-out-ness’, ‘communication’ (*Mitteilung*), is concerned with the public life of sign use, and in particular with the role of language in relation to Dasein’s everyday, ‘inauthentic’ understanding of being. As such it can be considered as Heidegger’s view of most language use. The term ‘Gerede’ means ‘rumour’ or ‘gossip’ and is usually translated as ‘idle talk’. However, since Heidegger denies that this term is intended to be ‘detractive’ (*herabziehend*; SZ 167) – a ‘denial’ that would be unnecessary, were the term’s negative connotations not so manifest – it will be rendered here more neutrally as ‘routine’ language use. Note that routine language use should not be confused with the use of ‘everyday language’, taken to refer to the use of a relatively small stock of commonplace linguistic means as opposed to highbrow or technical concepts. Rather, routine use is a *manner* or mode of language use, potentially applying to everyday and technical terms in the same way.

So what characterizes this routine mode of language use? Given that Dasein is ‘thrown’ into a historically conditioned intentional situation, the need arises to account for the constitutive role of language in setting this up. Heidegger recognizes this in emphasizing that routine use is a ‘positive phenomenon which constitutes everyday Dasein’s Understanding and Setting-out’ (SZ 167). It is the amorphous agency of everyday life that articulates Significance.<sup>76</sup> Language, as normally manifested in spoken and written use, ‘harbours in it a way of setting out [*Ausgelegtheit*] Dasein’s understanding’, and so too ‘already a developed conceptuality’ (SZ 167, 157). Accordingly, Dasein and language complement one another in their historicity: Language is a product of ‘the discoveredness respectively attained and handed down’ which ‘preserves, in the whole of its divided-up contexts of signification, an understanding of the disclosed world’, of self and others. Hence, for thrown Dasein, it conditions ‘the available possibilities and horizons for new approaches by Setting-out and conceptual articulation’ (SZ 168).

But the pejorative air of Heidegger’s term ‘Gerede’ is no coincidence. Rather it rhetorically accentuates a supposed negative aspect of routine language use. Routine use, Heidegger says, is the medium of ‘public interpretedness’ (SZ 169), which contents itself with an average kind of understanding. What is said can ‘be largely understood without the hearer’s bringing himself into an original

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<sup>76</sup> ‘Das Man-selbst [...] artikuliert den Verweisungszusammenhang der Bedeutsamkeit’ (SZ 129).

understanding being towards what is being talked about. [...] one means *the same*, because one understands what is said in the same averageness' (SZ 168). Words themselves, what is said, gain a 'life' of their own and can be passed from speaker to speaker as empty tokens in processes of 'hearsay'.<sup>77</sup> Without an 'original appropriation' of what is being spoken about, the 'initial lack of firm grounding [*Bodenständigkeit*]' of such freely circulating linguistic signs ascends to 'full groundlessness' (SZ 168). In this sense, the disclosive function of routine language use culminates in a counter-tendency to 'close off', a phenomenon that remains largely unnoticed because its 'indifferent intelligibility' leaves speakers with the impression that they understand everything (SZ 169).

On the face of it, then, Heidegger's view of routine language use is an ambivalent one: although conceding its constitutive role in everyday understanding of the world, it is clearly *insinuated* that this understanding is somehow inadequate. Understanding and explaining this ambivalence will, I suggest, prove highly instructive with regard to Heidegger's overall conception of language.

From what Heidegger says about routine language use as a 'positive phenomenon', three important commitments can be elicited which help provide a clearer picture of the task. The first of these, which Heidegger explicitly recognizes, is that everyday understanding, as mediated by routine language use, is a necessary precondition for attaining any kind of understanding. As he puts it, Dasein can 'never escape' everyday understanding, in which, out of which, and against which 'all genuine understanding, interpretation and communication, rediscovery and new appropriation' occurs (SZ 169). Heidegger does not think everyday understanding is the only mode of understanding of being, and contrasts this with 'authentic' understanding. Nonetheless, he maintains that *all* genuine understanding, not least 'authentic' understanding, 'remains dependent on One [*das Man*] and its world' (SZ 299): '*authentic* existence is not something that floats above falling everydayness', it is merely a 'modified grasping'; '*authentic* disclosedness' is still 'guided by the concernful lostness in One', but 'modifies' its understanding of being without a change "in its content" (SZ 179, 297). A second commitment explicitly recognized by Heidegger is that routine use of language in attaining everyday understanding commits us to a 'developed conceptuality' linked with a certain way of interpreting

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<sup>77</sup> SZ 169, 155. Heidegger elsewhere tersely describes this as 'Wortdenken, Hörensagen, Angelesenem' (GAP 274).

being. This immediately plausible claim is, I suggest, in considerable need of elucidation and will turn out to be a complex commitment: for in what way does routine language use embody a ‘conceptuality’ and in what way are we committed to or bound by it? To appreciate why these questions are nontrivial in Heidegger’s framework a third commitment should be considered. For his claim that much of what we learn in life never exceeds the ‘average understanding’ of ‘One’ clearly implies that such understanding, as a rule, is perfectly adequate to the purposes of everyday life (SZ 169). Language must, so to speak, be failing despite its successes. So whatever supposed deficiencies underlie Heidegger’s ambivalence towards routine language use, they must accommodate this triple commitment to its *indispensability*, its role in *conceptual conditioning*, and its *pragmatic adequacy* to majority of everyday needs.

When one comes to consider the source of the negative aspect of Heidegger’s ambivalence to routine language use, there are two obvious candidates. The first is suggested by his talk of the ‘averageness’ of the ‘public interpretedness’ of being. For this might seem to suggest a view, familiar from discussions of the division of linguistic labour, according to which speakers ordinarily have only schematic or ‘stereotypical’ awareness of concepts’ intensional properties, but are thereby enabled to use words in their ‘social meaning’, the full intensional and extensional character of which is determined by respective experts.<sup>78</sup> However, disregarding the fact that Heidegger does not explicitly consider the idea of such a distribution of competence, a difficulty remains with this proposal in that speaking this way about concepts treats words as object-like bearers of properties – in Heidegger’s terms as Things. And reasonable as it is to require an account of the kind of limitation implied by talk of ‘averageness’, Heidegger’s unequivocally dismissive claim that analysis in terms of ‘word Things’ ‘shatters’ language (SZ 161) signals that his reservations about routine language use can hardly be due to limited knowledge of intensional properties.

The second obvious candidate for explaining Heidegger’s reservations about routine language use is suggested by his emphasis on the foundational function of purposive understanding. For it is tempting to suppose that Heidegger thinks of everyday understanding of being as just purposive rather than predicative, that routine use of language mediates an awareness of what environing entities are for, but not of

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Putnam 1975, esp. 247 ff. and 228.

their objective properties. Apart from the fact that Heidegger says nothing explicit to this effect, there are two reasons for rejecting this proposal. To begin with, it would conflict with Heidegger's argument that traditional and 'vulgar' concepts engender a misguided ontological picture which conceals the foundational role of purposive awareness by presenting the world to us in an ontologically indifferent way as a nexus of Things (SZ 225). For this argument implies that the language we (routinely) speak presents the world to us as predicatively structured. Admittedly, given Heidegger's view that using sentences with a predicative form is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for predicative awareness (cf. page 34), the fact that established language is predicatively structured does not entail that speakers be aware of the predicative implications of the sentences they utter. Nonetheless, it does reveal something about the mode of conceptual conditioning Heidegger is assuming routine language use to effect: namely that this cannot be construed in terms of purposive factors alone. It is also, secondly, intrinsically implausible to suggest that everyday understanding of the world could possibly fail to involve predicative awareness of any degree, as though this were simply a subsequent theoretical superstructure. For as Heidegger himself emphasizes – in the previously quoted passage (SZ 158; cf. page 33) – theoretical predication is one extreme kind of speech act performed with sentences of a predicative structure. Yet if, as Heidegger there claims, it is unreasonable to assimilate all use of assertive sentences to theoretical predication, so too it would be wrong to claim that properties' attribution takes place only in 'theoretical' contexts: what something weighs, what colour it is, whether it is damaged by water etc. are properties basic to everyday interaction that are quite independent of specific functional expediency. So, given Heidegger's distinction between purposive and predicative awareness and his suggestion that these are two extremes on a graduated continuum, everyday understanding of the world, and with this the conceptual conditioning of routine language use, must encompass a blend of the two. Whatever deficiency Heidegger discerns in routine language use cannot therefore be captured straightforwardly using the purposive/predicative distinction.

In fact there is one useful, though rather cryptic, clue to the inadequacy Heidegger attributes to routine language use. Drawing on his characterization of the structure of Articulacy, Heidegger identifies a specific sense in which routine use is a limited actualization of its possibilities: in routine use – *Gerede* – 'hearing and understanding' cling to 'what is said [*das Geredete*] as such', 'Being with one

another moves in talking with one another and concern with what is said', 'What is said as such [...] takes on authoritative character'.<sup>79</sup> So routine use focuses on 'what is said', rather than on what is being talked about. Stated in this elliptic way, as it is in *SZ*, it is clear neither what this distinction amounts to, nor why it should be considered to identify a deficiency – after all, what could be more appropriate to language than attending to what is said? To get a clearer sense of both this claim and the overall perspective at work in Heidegger's ambivalence about language it will be revealing to look back several years prior to *SZ*. For, as will become clear, the conception of language found in *SZ* is shaped by Heidegger's earlier view of signs, so that reviewing the earlier model allows some important features to emerge more clearly than in *SZ*'s dense and sometimes occlusive narrative.

#### 4. Phenomenological concepts as formal indication

From 1918 through to the early 1920s Heidegger intended his philosophy to be a radicalization of Husserl's phenomenology. This project, as he construed it, involved understanding the way presuppositions, in particular its 'entire conceptual material', are made by phenomenological-philosophical enquiry. Accordingly, the 'problem of concept formation' – in the form of 'a phenomenology of intuition and expression' – took on 'central importance' in Heidegger's project of radicalizing phenomenology.<sup>80</sup> His response to this problem was a general characterization of the way signs or symbols function in phenomenological enquiry that he refers to as 'formal indication'. It should be pointed out that, although the term pervades his work around 1920-2, Heidegger never provided a systematic or comprehensive account of formal indication, so that reconstruction of his view must rely on interspersed comments in his writings.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless what he does say sheds light on what Heidegger took to be the proper function of concepts in the context of phenomenological enquiry.

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<sup>79</sup> *SZ* 168. – Incidentally, this provides a good example of Heidegger's exploitation of morphology. His terminology is supposed to make manifest that *Gerede* (rumour) is a form of *Rede* (Articulacy); moreover that *Gerede* focuses on *Geredetes* (what is said). The latter similarity might presumably be invoked in support of Heidegger's – nonetheless hardly plausible – claim that the term 'Gerede' is not intended pejoratively.

<sup>80</sup> *PAA* 168, 8, cf. 171. Heidegger even described the problem of concept formation as 'the philosophical problem in its origin' (*PAA* 169).

<sup>81</sup> The main sources of which are *PIA*, *AKJ*, *Rel* and *PAA*. He seems to have commenced such an account once, but abandoned it following complaints by students questioning its relevance in lectures ostensibly on the phenomenology of religion (cf. *Rel* 55-65; Kisiel 1993, 149 f.). – Awareness in the literature of the importance of formal indication has grown following the publication of Heidegger's

In considering Heidegger's notion of formal indication it helps to be mindful of two distinctions from the first of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. The first, between 'indication' and 'expression', concerns the way in which signs function as meaningful. Something functions as an 'indication' when its existence is taken by an agent to motivate belief in the existence of 'certain other objects or states of affairs' (i.e. that which is indicated; Husserl 1992b, 31 f.). This 'motivation' is due to there being some link between the indication and the indicated, so that it makes sense to describe them together. The links underlying such a 'descriptive unity' might be either causal links or the intentional use of arbitrary signs to stand for something, but Husserl excludes connections that are immediately obvious, or 'insightive' (*einsichtig*; Husserl 1992b, 32, 31; cf. 35). Thus an indicating sign suggests, but does not make it intuitively obvious, that what is indicated exists. Husserl contrasts indications with 'expressions' as – so to speak, properly – 'meaningful' signs (Husserl 1992b, 37), the sound of a word 'animated by meaning'.<sup>82</sup> The meaningfulness of expressions, he tells us, is due to certain 'meaning-conferring acts' or 'meaning intentions' that comprise the 'phenomenological characteristic of the expression as opposed to the empty sound of a word'.<sup>83</sup> In fact, although Husserl initially contrasts the two, indication and expression are not intended to be mutually exclusive functions. In spoken communication, for example, both occur: spoken words are expressions, since 'the speaker generates them with the intention of thus "speaking out about something"' and so 'conferring meaning on them'; yet at the same time in 'communicative talk', 'all expressions [...] function as indications' by standing for just those 'meaning-giving acts'.<sup>84</sup>

The second distinction, between meaningful intentions 'empty of intuition' and those 'fulfilled', is to concern the difference between meaning and knowledge and does constitute an exclusive contrast. Husserl defines fulfilment as the conscious

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early (1919-23) lectures. Dahlstrom (1994) and Imdahl (1994) offer particularly helpful surveys of the main sources and motifs; much of the relevant source material is summarized in Kisiel (1993).

<sup>82</sup> sinnbelebter Wortlaut, Husserl 1992b, 44. (Unlike Frege, Husserl famously considers 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' to be synonymous, cf. *ibid.*, 58.)

<sup>83</sup> Husserl 1992b, 44, 47. – Here there is obvious proximity to Grice's (1989, 215 ff.) distinction between natural and intentions-based nonnatural meaning, though Grice provides greater detail about the kind of intentions supposed to confer meaning.

<sup>84</sup> Husserl 1992b, 39, 40. Derrida (1993, cf. 46) has challenged Husserl's distinction by claiming that signs cannot function as expressions without being indications, further suggesting that the expressive function depends on a problematic notion of transcendental subjectivity's full presence to itself. As will become clear, Heidegger's conception of signs avoids these potential objections by being based on the indicative function and a different view of meaning conferral (or expressiveness).

‘realization’ or ‘actualization’ of the ‘objectual relationship’ signalled by a meaningful expression. Fulfilment, he explains, is inessential (*außerwesentlich*) to expressions as such, but can bring out their ‘appropriateness’ by ‘confirming, enhancing, [or] illustrating’ them (Husserl 1992b, 44). Fulfilment, then, is a conscious experience in which – otherwise ‘empty’ – expressions are validated.

The starting point for Heidegger is a distinction between ‘philosophical concepts’ and concepts in the individual sciences – which he called ‘ontic’ or ‘positive’ sciences and took to be defined in relation to a corresponding domain of entities.<sup>85</sup> Heidegger supposed the basic function of concepts in individual sciences to be classification or taxonomy of the entities concerned, with these being apprehended in terms of properties, i.e. as Things. Whether plausible or not, this claim indicates an important delimitation in that Heidegger sees the role of concepts in philosophy as differing from the essentially classificatory function of properties-based understanding. In a move characteristic of his reorientation of phenomenology to lived experience – and which would later facilitate his incorporation of existentialist ideas into a phenomenological framework – Heidegger sees the key distinction of philosophical concepts as being due to the *performed* or *actualized character* of philosophical understanding.<sup>86</sup> Correspondingly, the ‘peculiarity of philosophical concepts’ is to be understood in terms of the role they play in ‘the manner of philosophical experience and [...] the manner in which philosophical experience makes itself explicit’ (*PAA* 171).

The basic point of reference for Heidegger’s ‘philosophical concepts’ is some kind of apprehending experience, from which a definition or concepts result and to which they remain accountable. Such ‘grounding experience’ (*Gründerfahrung*), as he calls it, is the ‘specific performed context’ of understanding, ‘the situation of evidence’ or ‘experience in which the object properly [*eigentlich*] gives itself as that which it is and how it is’ (*PIA* 35 f.). Characterized in this way, grounding experience clearly corresponds both to Husserl’s acts of fulfilment, in which the objectual relationship is actualized in consciousness, and to Heidegger’s own later definition of a phenomenon (*SZ* 31). And, as this lineage suggests, this notion of ‘experience’ is

<sup>85</sup> For this contrast, cf. *Rel* 3-18; *GPP* 141-4, 235-7. On Heidegger’s view of ontic-positive sciences, cf. *SZ* 9 f., 51 f.

<sup>86</sup> *PIA* 1-2. They have the character of *Vollzug*, from *vollziehen* (to carry out, complete, or perform). As will become clearer in the sequel Dahlstrom (1994, 782n) is right to suggest that in “‘Vollziehen’ there is a sense of executing, carrying out, and performing but also a sense of accomplishing, perfecting, and fulfilling’.



intended to be broad, encompassing not only experience via sense perception, but any validating experience in the realm of thought or intentionality – in which sense Heidegger was later to credit Husserl with having rediscovered ‘the sense of all genuine philosophical “empiricism” [*Empirie*]’ (SZ 50n). Above all it should be noted that this is the basis of Heidegger’s talk of ‘originality’: grounding experience or the ‘concrete situation’ are the ‘sense-genesis’ or ‘original contexts of sense’; it is these that comprise the ‘proper original sphere’.<sup>87</sup>

Heidegger defines the function of philosophical concepts, as formal indications, in relation to grounding experience. The task of ‘[p]henomenological definition’ – Heidegger standardly treats definition as paradigmatic of formal indication<sup>88</sup> – is to indicate the ‘grounding experience’ such that the way ‘back’ to this is clear; accordingly, Heidegger demands, the concepts describing or defining an object should be created so as to reflect ‘the way in which the object becomes originally accessible’ (PIA 20). Reflecting this task, the term ‘formal indication’ has both a negative and a positive connotation. As with Husserl, the negative aspect is that formal indications are merely (unfulfilled or empty) *indications*. In Heidegger’s words: ‘indicating’ definitions ‘precisely do not give the object to be determined fully and properly [*eigentlich*]’; ‘indication of something by another’ means not ‘to show it in itself, but to represent [*darstellen*] it indirectly, mediately, symbolically’.<sup>89</sup> This constitutive shortfall – that signs present things that do not themselves appear – is marked by the term ‘indication’. Conversely, the qualification as ‘formal’ indication is to signal a positive characteristic (PIA 32 f.). A *formal* indication is one in which, although itself ‘empty’, the “[f]ormal” provides the “character of the approach” to performing [...] the original fulfilment of what is indicated’ (PIA 33). The point of this is that the link between formally indicating signs and what they stand for is to be tighter, or more determinate, than with arbitrary or unstructured indications. So whereas a high temperature can be a symptom, or indicative of indefinitely many kinds of illness, the link between signs and what they conceptualize is in some way to be revealed by their form. As Heidegger somewhat enigmatically describes it, formal indication is a use of signs that shows ‘the “way”, in its “outset”. Undetermined in

<sup>87</sup> PIA 23, PAA 179, 180, cf. also 186; KNS 24. – Such talk of originality once again echoes Husserl (e.g. 1992a, 246).

<sup>88</sup> He sees the ‘idea of definition’ as ‘nothing but the formal interpretation of the full sense of knowledge’ (PIA 54).

<sup>89</sup> PIA 32; PGZ 112. This idea is retained in SZ, where ‘indication’ is described as the basic structure of the appearance of ‘all indications, representations, symptoms and symbols’ (29).

content, a determinate bind on performance is given in advance'. The "formal" is such content as refers the indication in the [right] direction, prefigures the way'.<sup>90</sup> Thus in broad outline the function of philosophical concepts on Heidegger's account is as follows: formal indication is a use of signs the content of which is indeterminate, but which comprise a constraint serving to bring about the state of understanding from which they issue. In this sense, formal indications are to function as a pointer, a signpost, or a path to the corresponding grounding experience.

When compared with Husserl's conception of signs, a feature corresponding to meaning-conferring acts is conspicuously absent from Heidegger's discussions of formal indication. Along with Heidegger's general eschewal of psychological concepts, this can be explained by seeing formal indication as combining Husserl's contrast between indication and fulfilment with Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of expression, which centres on the mutual interdependence of experience, understanding and expression.<sup>91</sup> According to Dilthey, the lifeworld is permeated with ordered objective structures and practices that result from, and continue to shape human purposes and understanding. Such 'objectifications of spirit' or 'expressions of life' range from 'morals, law, the state, religion, art, science and philosophy' through to 'every square planted with trees, every room in which chairs are arranged', and includes linguistic expressions (Dilthey 1990, 252, 177, 256). Because they result from processes of understanding and determinate possibilities of experience, and are hence literally expressions of these, Dilthey reasoned that such objectifications allow those same possibilities to be relived or reactualized.<sup>92</sup> So on this view – which I am suggesting Heidegger adopts – the expressiveness, or meaningfulness, of signs is due not to meaning-conferring intentions, but to their embodying and standing in a determinate relationship to particular situations of actualized understanding. Moreover, forms of expression that emerge from acts of understanding are to be

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<sup>90</sup> *PIA* 20 ("formal" anzeigend' means 'der "Weg", im "Ansatz". Es ist eine gehaltlich unbestimmte, vollzugshaft bestimmte Bindung vorgegeben'), 34.

<sup>91</sup> Dilthey 1990, 235 ff. (cf. 157, 176). Heidegger refers to this triad – *Erlebnis, Verstehen, Ausdruck* – explicitly at *PAA* 169. – Many of Heidegger's key notions (e.g. existentials, significance, temporality, historicity) are prefigured in Dilthey. For a good survey of such themes cf. Guignon 1983, 45-59.

<sup>92</sup> Dilthey 1990, 263-7. This idea was later relied on by Collingwood's (1958, cf. 150; 1994, e.g. 115, 172, 203) 'expression theory' in aesthetics and the philosophy of history.

intrinsically conducive to reattaining that same understanding, and it is in this sense that they ‘point to’ their grounding experience.<sup>93</sup>

Heidegger’s notion of formal indication goes beyond Dilthey’s view, however, by intimating in virtue of what expressions point to their grounding experiences. As already hinted, the qualification ‘formal’ means for Heidegger that the ‘sense structure’ of the ‘empty’ content ‘provides the direction of performance’ (*PIA* 33). In other words, the structuredness and interrelatedness of the signs used are taken to ‘point’ the way to, and so enable, experiences of understanding. The determining sense-structure of linguistic forms thus comprises a clue to the link between the indication and indicated that distinguishes formal indication from arbitrary or unstructured indications. Nevertheless, to preserve the distinction between indication and performed apprehension, and corresponding to Husserl’s stipulation that indications are not ‘insightive’, the clue provided by the sense-structure cannot suffice to induce immediate understanding.<sup>94</sup> Rather, Heidegger explains, in ‘order to grasp the complete sense’ of a formal indication, to follow where it points, ‘radical interpretation of the “formal” itself is required’ (*PIA* 33). This interpretation of ‘empty’ symbolic forms is a means to the end of ‘performed understanding of the formally indicating definition’; it is part of a process of ‘working forth to the situation’ in which formally indicating ‘characteristics’ become ‘deformalized’ by ‘receiving the concrete factual categorial determination from the respective direction of experience and interpretation’.<sup>95</sup> So put simply, ‘formal’ or ‘empty’ signification and actualized or performed understanding are two extremes between which interpretation mediates. In ideally actualized understanding, one would appreciate how each of the various features of one’s symbolic representation are motivated by corresponding features of the phenomenon in question.

Against this background Heidegger’s view of concepts can be seen to epitomize commitment to phenomenological accountability in being guided by the idea that concepts are somehow proper to their respective phenomenal origin, the grounding experience in which they arise and to which they remain internally related. For formal indications are to be characterized by what might be called the twin

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<sup>93</sup> Thus grounding experience, as performed understanding, plays the same role as Dilthey’s notion of *Erlebnis* (experience). See Gadamer’s (1990, 70 ff.) insightful discussion of this role as attempting to model methodology in the humanities on that of empirical natural science.

<sup>94</sup> Heidegger repeatedly opposes the ‘prejudice’ that phenomenology’s emphasis on direct insight means grasping things ‘in a flash’ without interpretative effort (*PGZ*, 36 f.; cf. *SZ* 36 f.).

<sup>95</sup> *PIA* 72, 141. Heidegger often talks of ‘deformalization’ (e.g. *AKJ* 24; *SZ* 35).

virtues of *phenomenal receptivity* and *expressiveness*. The first of these requires that concepts be literally shaped by phenomena: ‘the conceptuality of the object in the respective definitional determination must be drawn from the way *in which the object becomes originally accessible*’ (*PIA* 20). In this way ‘the function of “meaning-differentiation by forms” proceeds from the [phenomenal] “material”’ (*AKJ* 13), such that definitions and concepts (i.e. use of signs) are literally to be articulations of grounding experience, the intensity of sense, or determinacy, of a phenomenon in its proper context. Expressiveness is the correlate of phenomenal receptivity: the former implies that in being used ‘significantly’ signs capture to some degree the sense manifested in phenomenal contexts, so that formally structured signs quite literally express phenomenal features. As Heidegger puts it, the meanings of ‘linguistic expressions’ should ‘spring into’ them ‘out of the phenomenal context and its categorial tendencies’.<sup>96</sup> By being thus expressive of, or standing for, certain phenomenal features, signs in turn acquire the peculiarity of evoking the original sense context. The efficacy of signs, on this picture, is due to their formally articulated expressiveness, which makes them conducive to actualizing the understanding in which they are based.<sup>97</sup>

The idea of formal indication is clearly based on a fairly straightforward representational model according to which linguistic articulations correspond to phenomenal features. Significantly, however, formal indication is assumed to be approximative or schematic in character, as constitutively lacking the concretion of sense in actual phenomena. It has, Heidegger emphasizes, a ‘necessarily restricted mode of performance’ since, although its content ‘directs [us] to the manner of proper encounter’, it remains inconclusive in leaving ‘the genuine phenomena to become determinately decisive’ (*PIA* 74, 33 f.). This constitutive inconclusiveness is significant because it underlies Heidegger’s view of the way phenomenology makes presuppositions, that is of how formal indication solves the problem to which it was addressed. The ‘ineluctable significance’ of formal indication, he claims, lies in its being ‘genuinely motivated by the concrete and factual [...] as non-prejudicial, but also non-decisive, prefigurative touching on the factual’ (*PAA* 85). In other words,

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<sup>96</sup> *PIA* 144. In this spirit, Heidegger also suggests that grammatical relationships are grounded in phenomenal relations (*PIA* 82-3).

<sup>97</sup> Indeed Heidegger experimented with the term ‘expressive concepts’ (*GPP* 240) to reflect this Diltheyan interdependence of experience, understanding, and expression. – Even in *SZ* ‘*ausdrücklich*’ might be construed in terms of such expressiveness (cf. footnote 28).

formal indication is a use of signs through which phenomena are addressed in a provisional, tentative, and hence corrigible manner. Understanding the functioning of signs in this way meant that phenomenological enquiry can be understood as an ongoing cycle of interpreting phenomena – with signs formally indicating phenomena and phenomena prefiguring the forms of symbolic indication.<sup>98</sup> Formal indication is the ‘method of outset of phenomenological interpretation in each stage of its execution’, with ‘the interpretation’s preconception’ each time ‘stem[ming] from the respective stage of appropriation’ (*PIA* 141, 87).

Before returning to consider its relevance to *SZ*, I want briefly to highlight three features of Heidegger’s notion of formal indication that are relevant to assessing not only this notion, but also a phenomenological conception of language more generally. The first is that Heidegger’s discussions seem to invoke an ideal of full actual presentation of sense, the kind of ‘*presence* of sense to a full and original intention’ that Derrida (1993, 3) has portrayed as a dubious metaphysical assumption underlying Husserl’s phenomenology. For in grounding experiences, the basis of ‘concrete work’, the ‘(ultimate) structural sense of the full object’ is to be possessed in its full determination; a ‘phenomenon’ is simply the ‘being present of an object’ (*PIA* 28; *Ont* 69). However, whether or not Heidegger was assuming such an idealized presence of sense, it is important to realize that his view of the function of formal indication as approximative or schematic could survive without it. Although his picture involves some kind of actualization of understanding, that role might be understood in relation to aspectual or partial presentations such as Husserl’s ‘adumbrations’ or Merleau-Ponty’s corresponding view of the indirectness of intentional objects.

The second feature to highlight is that on Heidegger’s model the function of signs is what might be called ‘simple preservation’: i.e. actual or performed understanding is laid down in language such that it can later be reactualized in just the same way. Formal indications thus function, or fail to function, as deposition and reactivation, in much the same way as a long-playing record. Underlying this is Heidegger’s assumption that there is an internal link between formal indications and determinate grounding experiences, between signs and their ‘origins’. This implies

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<sup>98</sup> This process, which Heidegger once aptly termed ‘*diahermeneutics*’ (*GPP* 262), features in *SZ* (153, 314 f.) as the ‘hermeneutic circle’.

that the relationship between expressions and their sense-genetic origins is essentially atemporal: Actualized understanding may deteriorate into ‘empty’ use of indications and so stand in need of ‘reappropriation’, but there is no allowance for the ravages of time or the internal workings of language eroding the internal link between expressions and the grounding experiences proper to them. Rather, on this model, language would be a pseudo-temporal phenomenon, a ‘process’ with no intrinsic temporality.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, a major source of obscurity in Heidegger’s idea of formal indication is the idea of ‘form’ it relies on. In being contrasted with ‘deformalizing’ situations of ‘evidence’, it is clearly supposed to function as one pole of something like a form-content distinction, or more precisely a form-fulfilment distinction. Unfortunately, the one passage where Heidegger undertakes to explain the sense of ‘formal’ in formal indication is of limited use. He there compares and contrasts his use of the term ‘formal’ with Husserl’s distinction between (eidetic) formalization and (classificatory) generalization (cf. Husserl 1992c, 31 [§13]). As Heidegger sees it, generalization is ordering within a framework of genres and species that entails reference to the subject matter being classified, whereas formalization is to be subject-matter independent and pertain to ‘formal ontological’ categories such as thing, experience, object (*Rel* 58 f.). He attempts to link this with formal indication by claiming that the latter should ‘indicate the relation to the phenomenon in advance’ or what he called ‘relational sense’ (*Rel* 63). This claim relies on a distinction Heidegger standardly made during his early phenomenological period between three ‘directions of sense’ found in any phenomenon: (a) content sense (*Gehaltssinn*): ‘what’ is ‘originally experienced in it’; (b) relational sense (*Bezugssinn*): the ‘original manner in which it is experienced’; and (c) performative sense (*Vollzugssinn*): the ‘original manner in which the relational sense is performed’ or actualized.<sup>100</sup> However, it seems to me that Heidegger is here in a tangle: First, he fails to offer any reason as to why the ‘formal’ should not convey all three kinds of sense he distinguishes. Second, it is far from clear that a formal indication could serve its purpose without some determination of ‘what’ is involved. Third, the restriction to relational sense is

<sup>99</sup> Not surprisingly therefore §68d of *SZ* – on the ‘temporality of Articulacy [*Rede*]’ – is conspicuously brief. Though Heidegger reassures us that ‘Articulacy is in itself temporal’ and ‘grounded in the ecstatic unity of temporality’, he has nothing specific to say about the temporality of language (either *Rede* or *Sprache*) as such. For Heidegger, on his own gloss, ‘temporality of Articulacy, that is, of *Dasein* altogether’ (*SZ* 349).

<sup>100</sup> *Rel* 63. This tripartite view of sense is also found at e.g. *PIA* 53 f.; *PAA* 60; *AKJ* 22; *GPP* 261.

inconsistent with Heidegger's own subsequent discussions of formal indication which routinely treat them as having 'content'.<sup>101</sup>

Nonetheless, quite independently of the question of what exactly it conveys, Heidegger does not explicate what he means by 'form'. To the extent that language is to be construed as formal indication – which is clearly implied by Heidegger's discussions (e.g. by construing definition as formal indications) – the relevant notion of form can be taken to be that of linguistic form at all syntactic levels, i.e. definitions, sentences, words, etc. But this leaves open important questions as to what aspects of linguistic form are relevant in directing us to features of the world: Are the inferential properties of sentences or expressions 'formal' in Heidegger's sense? Do letters, words, and sentences all 'point' to phenomena in the same way? Are we supposed to agree with the view half-heartedly proposed by Socrates that individual letters have their own expressive or representational properties?<sup>102</sup> And, finally, how might Heidegger have responded to the obvious difficulty posed by the 'arbitrariness' of linguistic signs? To answer such questions clearly requires a more detailed view about the 'formal' qualities in virtue of which linguistic signs 'point out' features of the world.

## 5. The disclosive function of linguistic signs

The motivation for examining Heidegger's earlier views was to explain his ambivalence about the role of routine language use in *SZ*, i.e. to explain its apparently negative attitude towards routine language use while acknowledging its indispensability, its role in conceptual conditioning, and its pragmatic adequacy. How does the notion of formal indication do this?

Since *SZ* contains no account of formal indication and references to it are sparse and seemingly incidental, some evidence should perhaps be mentioned for assuming its relevance to the later work.<sup>103</sup> To begin with there is testimonial

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<sup>101</sup> E.g., from 1921-2, *PIA* 33 f. – Indeed even in the above 1920-1 discussion Heidegger seems unable to uphold his own distinction: 'because formal determination is completely indifferent in content [*inhaltlich indifferent*] [...] it prescribes a theoretical relational sense [...] covers up the performative aspect [*das Vollzugsmäßige*][...] and directs itself one-sidedly towards the content [*Gehalt*]' (*Rel* 63).

<sup>102</sup> Plato 1926, 142-149 [425d-427d].

<sup>103</sup> Heidegger talks literally of 'formal indication' (*formale Anzeige*) or cognates at *SZ* 114, 116, 117, 231, 313, 315; of temporary indication at *SZ* 14, 41; formal sense at *SZ* 34, 43 and of indication of a formal concept at *SZ* 53. – These references might seem sparser still in English translation as MacQuarrie/Robinson (1962) miss, and so do not render, the terminological significance of

evidence in that Heidegger himself continued to emphasize the importance of formal indication both at and beyond the time of *SZ*'s publication. For example, in a letter to Karl Löwith in August 1927, he writes: 'Formal indication, critique of the customary doctrine of the *a priori*, formalization and the like, all of that is still for me there [in *SZ*] even though I do not talk about them now' (quoted from Kisiel 1993, 19). And in his 1929/30 lectures formal indication is still described as the basic or pervasive character of philosophical concepts (*GM* 425, 430).

More significant, perhaps, are several terminological and structural parallels between formal indication and views expounded in *SZ*. Most obviously, the emptiness-fulfilment distinction on which the formal-indication model is built suggests a basis for Heidegger's qualified disqualification of routine language use. In particular the negative characterization of routine language use in *SZ*, as lacking actualized understanding and grounding (experience), clearly corresponds to the 'emptiness' of formal indications. Particularly telling, however, is the fact that the same two fundamental regulative concepts are applied in discussing both formal indication and Dasein's disclosedness in *SZ*. Thus the notion of 'originality' is correlated with grounding experience, as the source of sense, not only (as already pointed out) in the early conception, but also in *SZ*.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the distinction between formal emptiness and fulfilment in grounding experience is cast in terms of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*, the centrally important terms in *SZ* usually rendered as (in)authenticity, but discussed above in terms of (im)propriety. Thus indications, being empty, are 'improper'; whereas apprehension, or understanding, comes to be 'proper' when fulfilled, actualized, or performed.<sup>105</sup> To be sure, in the context of *SZ* these terms are quite naturally taken to have an existentialist connotation, bearing on Dasein's self-realization and appropriation of its hermeneutic situation. But in the light of Heidegger's phenomenological conception of signs it

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'indication'; with the exception of p. 315, this oversight is remedied in Stambaugh's (1996) revised translation.

<sup>104</sup> 'Originality' is characterized only once, and briefly, in *SZ*. It is there characterized as requiring: (i) the securing of 'a phenomenally suitable hermeneutic situation', which involves finding an appropriate provisional interpretation of a 'grounding experience' (*Grunderfahrung*); (ii) that 'the whole of the thematic entity' is treated; (iii) that the 'unity of [its] structural aspects' is found (*SZ* 231 f.).

<sup>105</sup> The clearest examples of this use are found at *PIA* 33-35, but cf. *PIA* 41, 60, 62-3, 73. For example: "'Formally indicated" means [...] indicated in such a way that what's said is of the character of the "formal", improper [*uneigentlich*]; Formal indication 'provides the way to try out and to fulfil what's improperly [*uneigentlich*] indicated', so that it comes to be proper [*zum Eigentlichen kommen*]' (*PIA* 33). The opposite of improper indication is 'proper possession [*das eigentliche Haben*]', 'the specific being of what's respectively performed' (*PIA* 34).



should be noted that ‘proper’ apprehension (also) denotes an epistemological distinction. The problem with the ‘situation of understanding in its outset’, Heidegger explains, is that ‘the object’ does not offer ‘itself fully and properly [*eigentlich*]’ (*PIA* 34). By contrast, grounding experience is to be the ‘situation of evidence’ in which a decision is made according to ‘experience in which the object properly [*eigentlich*] gives itself as that which it is and how it is’ (*PIA* 35). So there are two sides to the ‘propriety’ of grounding experience: it is not simply that an agent ‘appropriates’ objects, making them cognitively its own, but also that the object of understanding simultaneously shows itself (‘properly’) as it in itself is.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the ideal of phenomenal receptivity also recurs in *SZ*. For example, in his discussion of the development of Understanding Heidegger emphasizes that Setting-out can either ‘create the conceptuality belonging to the entity [...] from this itself’, or ‘force [this entity] into concepts’ which conflict with its ‘manner of being’ (*SZ* 150). Or again, as he puts it in introducing Articulacy – in precisely the terms used to characterize the deficiency of routine language use – ‘*what* is said’ should be drawn or created (*geschöpft*) from ‘what is talked about’ and so make this manifest and accessible to others.<sup>107</sup>

As these parallels suggest, the principal importance of the idea of formal indication is its positive aspect, i.e. what it tells us about the way Heidegger thought signs could, or ideally should, function as phenomenological concepts. The ideal supposedly underpinning the proper functioning of concepts is concisely stated in his summer 1924 lectures. When ‘meaning and the use of a word’ function optimally, he there explains, the object addressed is broken down into the ‘proper “respectiveness” comprising such an object [...], so that I see it in its proper articulatedness’ (*GAP* 37 f.). So this is Heidegger’s ideal: that the function of concepts is to allow features of the world to be seen as articulated in the way linguistic forms present them to us. Significantly, the same ideal is also found in *SZ*’s general determination of the function of Articulacy in *SZ* as ‘pointing to’ what is talked about so as to allow it to be ‘directly seen’ or ‘inspected’ (*SZ* 32, 34). The proper function of Articulacy is thus the same as that of formal indication, namely to see the world directly in the way it is

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *SZ* 28. – Kisiel (1993, 46) talks of a ‘properizing event’ and accurately captures this reciprocity: ‘It is my proper experience because it appropriates me and I, in accord, appropriate it. I am It, I am of It, It is mine’.

<sup>107</sup> *SZ* 32. Cf. 315, and 35, where it is emphasized that in phenomenology, the ‘character of description’, ‘the specific sense of the λόγος’, should be fixed by the nature of the subject matter (*Sachheit*) to be described.

presented (by language) as being. The core function of signs, according to this ideal, is to present features of the world in a certain way which can then prove to be appropriate or otherwise. In the following I want to hold on to this thought by saying that linguistic expressions have a *presentational sense* and that, since it is the form of the signs used that effects presentation of the world in a certain ‘articulation’, this should be taken to be due specifically to the form of linguistic expressions.<sup>108</sup>

Of course, if the distinction between empty and fulfilled, or improper and proper, sign use is to be upheld phenomenologically, it must be possible for such articulate seeing to fail to take place – indeed SZ’s discussion of routine language use suggests this is the standard case. This possibility is accommodated by the role Heidegger attributes to interpretation and the approximative or schematic character of formal indications. For, as seen above, interpretation has the role – so-called ‘deformalization’ – of cashing out formally indicating features of signs in terms of phenomenal features of the world. The need to do this arises from the schematic character of formal indications, which allows that it may not be immediately obvious how they relate to phenomena.<sup>109</sup> In other words, the formal-indication model allows us to have ‘empty’ awareness, as opposed to awareness of the phenomenal ‘fulfilment’ implied by the forms of language we use, i.e. to be in possession of linguistic forms without being able to map them interpretatively onto the features of reality (assuming there to be such) that make them appropriate.

With regard to ‘empty’ understanding, however, an important limitation of the formal indication model emerges, insofar as this is conceived of almost entirely negatively in relation to grounding experiences. For although the significance of signs is anchored in form, it is conceived of only as the sketchy imprint of actual phenomena. Yet with this one-sidedness the formal-indication model seems to suggest that empty intending itself consists in nothing positive.<sup>110</sup> Whether or not this possibility is coherent in considering the function of signs in the rarefied context of

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<sup>108</sup> Although the terminological proximity here to Lange’s (1951, 79-102) interesting contrast between discursive and presentational forms of symbol is no coincidence, I do not intend to follow the (often problematic) details of her account. In particular, I am suggesting that language has presentational aspects, so that the discursive-presentational distinction cannot coincide with that between linguistic and nonlinguistic forms in the way Lange often seems to imply.

<sup>109</sup> An analogy might be an infra-red photo of a familiar face which presents its features in an unfamiliar, reduced way so that recognition perhaps requires ‘interpretative’ effort.

<sup>110</sup> Thus prior to SZ Heidegger appears to have overlooked Husserl’s warning that for theories which define meaning solely in relation to intuitive fulfilment the phenomenon of ‘symbolic thinking’ remains an ‘insoluble puzzle’ (Husserl 1992b, 72).

phenomenological enquiry, to which the notion of formal indication was tailored, it would be obviously inadequate in the framework of a general account of language. However, by integrating the understanding of linguistic entities within its general account of the foundational function of purposive awareness, *SZ* has the means to fill this lacuna in Heidegger's earlier conception of signs. And indeed, as seen in section 1 above, Heidegger extends his view of the foundational function of purposive understanding to language. The result is a pervasive instrumentalism in *SZ*'s characterizations of language: 'statements' are 'equipmental' entities, as are words, the totality of which – as the 'spoken-out-ness' of Articulacy – comprises language (*SZ* 161, 224, 161). This instrumentalism emerges most clearly, as one might expect, in Heidegger's conception of signs in §17, in which signs are characterized as Equipment whose use is embedded in and serves to make manifest instrumental relations.<sup>111</sup> On Heidegger's view, therefore, our basic grasp of language, of linguistic entities, is of a kind with the purposive understanding of other tools, with words and sentences being grasped in terms of 'what they are for' and not as object-like entities bearing certain ('semantic') properties. Hence it can be allowed that the understanding we have in using language is of this instrumental kind even if it is 'empty' in the sense of not meeting the positive ideal of formal indication.

At this point one complication should be considered. In the light of what has just been said it might be thought that the distinction between emptiness and fulfilment is now to coincide with that between purposive and predicative understanding. But this, I think, would be a mistake. First because, as pointed out above, it is implausible that everyday use of language should completely exclude predicative awareness. But a further reason, again as previously seen, is provided by Heidegger's view that both purposive and predicative modes of Setting-out exist. This seems to imply that one can have or fail to have an articulate grasp of the world in two corresponding ways, so that the emptiness-fulfilment contrast might be applied to each mode, yielding a somewhat more complex overall picture. To have or to lack the ability to interpret ('Set out') entities purposively would be to have or to lack articulate understanding in the sense of knowing how to do certain things. Conversely, predicative Setting-out concerns the ability to grasp purpose-independent properties,

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<sup>111</sup> *SZ* 82. – As Heidegger claims (*SZ* 77) to be discussing signs so as to clarify the character of instrumental relations (*Verweisungen*), it might be objected that taking this as bearing on language is an interpretative assumption. However, unless language – the 'spoken-out-ness of Articulacy' – is thought not to involve the use of signs, the assumption is surely justified.

make inferences and reason. While this complication means the purposive-predicative distinction does not correspond simply to the emptiness-fulfilment contrast, together with Heidegger's purposive-foundation thesis it does suggest a basis for his claims about routine language use. For it identifies a minimal mode of (purposive) understanding, the possession of which is quite compatible with a *tendency* to fail to actualize (e.g. founded, predicative) understanding. As a result Heidegger's notion of routine language use can be thought of as involving both purposive and predicative understanding of the world (of 'what is talked about') that suffices for everyday purposes. In this way it can plausibly claim to meet the constraint of pragmatic adequacy, while simultaneously tending to exhibit inadequacies that motivate Heidegger's ambivalence about its disclosive efficacy.

Overall the conception of the disclosive function of linguistic signs in *SZ* might be summed up as the result of trying to fuse the ideals of presentational sense underlying formal indication with the story Heidegger tells about the foundational role of purposive understanding. This fusion can be seen to underlie Heidegger's ambivalence towards routine language use. On the one hand the presentational function of formal indications identifies a positive ideal for the functioning of phenomenological concepts, viz. that of actualizing awareness of how what we are talking about is presented to us by language, by which routine language use is held to fail. This failure amounts to being unable to interpret features of the language we use in terms of correlative phenomenal features, and thus in not appreciating the presentational sense of the expressions we are using. But the negative assessment this suggests must be tempered, on pain of absurdity, since the failure to actualize understanding in routine use cannot be complete. Such absurdity is avoided by the claim that language (what is said) is grasped instrumentally in conjunction with the thought that in being so grasped language mediates an understanding of the world (of what is talked about) which suffices for everyday purposes.

Against this background, the difference between Heidegger's talk of 'averageness' of understanding and the 'stereotypical' awareness of words' intensional properties in the division-of-labour view can be better appreciated. To begin with the latter seems phenomenologically unconvincing, since we are not usually conscious of the supposed properties of words mediating understanding. This fact can be explained by Heidegger's view, which suggests a different conceptual priority: i.e. it is not that (intensional) properties of words mediate awareness of

features of the world, but that what it is for a word to have certain (intensional) properties must be spelt out by interpreting it in terms of features of the world. Heidegger's view thus offers a direct account of the routine functioning of language, whereas the stereotype thesis introduces intensional properties as an initially obscure, and presumably superfluous, intermediary.

What of Heidegger's otherwise cryptic characterization of routine use as being directed to 'what is said', rather than 'what is talked about'? Although this characterization clearly intends to suggest that 'what is talked about' is understood only superficially or minimally, it is less clear how to construe Heidegger's formulaic 'what is said' (*das Geredete*). Does this have the honorific sense, 'what is *said*', referring to successfully expressed propositional content? Or is it a slighting reference to 'what is said', as the words uttered with a quality bordering on that of mere noise? Though Heidegger never says anything that would resolve this matter directly,<sup>112</sup> his various comments incline to the latter. This reading is supported by considering Heidegger's view that different degrees of understanding can be brought to bear on the same utterance, according to how well it can be interpreted phenomenally. For on this view 'what is said' remains constant between superficial and more penetrating interpretations of an utterance's phenomenal implications in a way that would be unintelligible if 'what is said' were taken to mean 'propositional content'. So it is most plausible to read 'what is said' as referring literally just to the words uttered, such that the superficial understanding of routine use borders on the merely verbal, of knowing merely which linguistic forms to use in which circumstances.<sup>113</sup>

If the preceding reading of Heidegger's views is correct, it faces an obvious challenge. Knowing which words to utter in which circumstances, it may be objected, is perfectly adequate as a characterization of what understanding language consists in. By contrast, Heidegger's ideal of transparent presentation might be dismissed as irrelevant to the functioning of language as a public phenomenon, and as reminiscent of the simplistic hypostatization of linguistic imagery which the later Wittgenstein mocks. Now in a sense this objection is redundant. For far from denying that knowledge of this kind suffices as knowledge of language, this is precisely

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<sup>112</sup> Even the apparent elucidation 'Das Gesagte wird [im Gerede] zunächst immer verstanden als "sagendes", das ist entdeckendes' is part of explaining how routine language use is in fact a covering up, i.e. is 'initially' wrongly taken to be discovering or 'saying' (SZ 169).

<sup>113</sup> For a suggestion of this kind cf. SZ 5.

Heidegger's point. It is despite this that he discerns language's failure to convey fully interpretative awareness of phenomena. Nevertheless, the objection does pick out something important. For Heidegger's negative comments about routine language use arise from modelling the function of signs in terms of presentational feats, *even though* this model seems, by his own account, to be largely irrelevant to the practical functioning of language. This reliance on two different kinds of standard seems to some extent incongruous, and perhaps indicative of a tension, as the standard of presentational sense is not only extraneous to practical concerns but appears to conflict with Heidegger's rhetorical emphasis on the foundational importance of purposive understanding.

The key to reconciling the two different types of demand is found in the conception of signs of SZ §17. As Heidegger summarizes this, the 'Sign is ontic Equipment [*ontisch Zuhandenes*] which [...] *simultaneously* [...] indicates the ontological structure of Handiness, the totality of instrumental relations and worldliness' (italics added; SZ 82). It is crucial to appreciate that this definition is twofold. In a basic sense, signs are instruments with a determinate function. So, like other instruments, they are 'constituted by instrumental relating' and are a means to getting things done within practical contexts (SZ 78). Beyond this Heidegger attributes to signs a '*distinguished* use' that sets them apart from other instruments.<sup>114</sup> Thus, unlike other instruments, a sign 'explicitly raises an instrumental whole into circumspection'; signs 'allow the Equipmental to [be] encounter[ed]', or 'more exactly, a context' of such Equipmentality, they 'show primarily that "in which" one lives' (SZ 80, 79 f.). Heidegger emphasizes this 'peculiar instrumental character of signs' with regard to the creation or 'institution of signs': because the worldly context usually remains inconspicuous, an instrument is needed to do the "work" of *allowing* the ready-to-hand to *become conspicuous*'; hence the 'production of such instruments (of signs) must be attentive to their conspicuousness' and tailored to assure 'easy accessibility' (SZ 80). Thus, independently of the various specific uses to which they may be put, this dual conception also identifies a general standard of propriety for sign-instruments, insofar as these can be more or less well suited to the task of inducing awareness of their context.

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<sup>114</sup> SZ 79. Given the expression 'vorzügliche Verwendung', and the nature of the distinction he suggests, it is quite possible that Heidegger is here exploiting the relationship of *vorziehen* – the literal sense of which is to bring or draw forth – and *vorzüglich* (distinctive, excellent): the distinctive use of signs being to bring to the fore instrumental relations.

In this characterization of signs' 'distinction' or 'peculiarity' it is not difficult to recognize again the influence of formal indication's presentational function, in particular the ideas of phenomenal receptivity and expressiveness. But in *SZ* the presentational sense signs have due to their form is conjoined with what I shall call *pragmatic sense*, due to the respective roles they have as instruments in established practices. Thus *SZ*'s twofold conception of signs is tailored to meet the demands of both pragmatic sense, since signs are instruments; and presentational sense, since these instruments are specifically formed so as to be good at 'pointing to' phenomena. In this light Heidegger's reliance on two kinds of standard – the presentational and the pragmatic – is less surprising. For although the presentational ideal is perhaps extraneous to practical concerns, both kinds of aim – so to speak, the foundational and the aspirational – are combined in his conception of a sign.

But how is the distinction between presentational and pragmatic sense to be understood? Is it genuine or merely a superficial semblance? I want to claim it is genuine and that an important virtue of *SZ*'s conception of signs is to fuse two distinct sense-generating mechanisms, the structure of linguistic forms and the role of expressions in human practices, each of which has implications for the inferential properties that linguistic expressions manifest in sentential contexts. One obvious reason for suspecting that there is some slippage between these two articulatory factors is that identical practices can be carried out in different languages, such that words which are in some respects pragmatically equivalent can nonetheless have quite different implications in virtue of syntactic differences. But this is effectively where the Heideggerian path comes to an end. For although Heidegger places great emphasis on the foundational importance of purposive understanding in *SZ*, he offers no more detailed account of the way in which conceptual commitments – or if one prefers: the structure of disclosure – are inherent in the practices amidst which *Dasein* is 'thrown'. Further, as noted in the previous section, while orienting his whole account of signs towards the goal of presenting the world in an articulate manner, Heidegger never provides anything more than passing hints as to what comprises the 'formal' aspect of language (or concepts). Thus in *SZ*, while insisting on the need to liberate 'grammar' from 'logic', Heidegger again postpones consideration of the form of Articulacy, claiming only that settling 'the basic forms' of an 'articulation of what can be understood altogether' presupposes his analytic of *Dasein* (*SZ* 165 f.). In these respects Heidegger's twofold instrumentalist conception of signs ultimately offers

only a schematic framework, so that an important task for the following chapters will be to give substance to the distinction between presentational and pragmatic sense.

In doing this there is an additional constraint. For since, as previously pointed out, a distinctive feature of Heidegger's position is that it allows prepredicative uses of language, i.e. of linguistic forms, both pragmatic and presentational sense should be explicable in a way consistent with their involvement in prepredicative use. Consequently, both should be understood in terms of factors that are subpropositional, subinferential, and irreducible to the predicative functioning of propositions. This does not, of course, mean that presentational and pragmatic sense should be isolated from predicative uses – for they should provide the (subinferential) foundation for such 'derivative' uses. Indeed, the rationale for describing presentational or pragmatic sense as 'sense' is precisely that they can be exploited in these different – prepredicative or predicative – ways. That is, the term 'sense' in the following is intended to refer to factors that structurally influence linguistic articulation, with the distinction between these two types of sense corresponding to two different kinds of structural influence. So the task for the following two chapters will be to draw on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein to set out, in a phenomenologically plausible way, how linguistic form and practical factors are of structural relevance to both prepredicative and predicative uses of language.

Before moving on to this much larger task, it should be noted that it is now possible to see how Heidegger's position – at least in outline – meets its two remaining obligations. The general shape of his answer to the question of how routine language use embodies a 'conceptuality' is twofold, with conceptual commitments being shaped by both the requirements of various practices and the constraints imposed by operating with a certain set of linguistic forms. In addition, the indispensability of signs to both empty and fulfilled, or improper and proper, understanding can be appreciated. Signs are required by fulfilled understanding, since this presupposes being presented (or 'indicated') in some articulation by linguistic forms. But they are also required for empty understanding since – even in the absence of 'fulfilment' – routine language use is involved in the constitution of the instrumental nexus of Significance.

Finally, describing the function of linguistic signs as 'instrumental' introduces a potential misunderstanding due to an accident of historical usage. Locke, for example, describes language as 'the great Instrument' and words as instruments that



man uses arbitrarily ‘as marks for the Ideas within his own Mind’ (1975, 402, [III.1.§1; cf. §5]). On this usage, language is merely a means (an ‘instrument’) for communicating thoughts that is *extrinsic* to, i.e. not essentially involved in, meaning constitution. Against this background it is often suggested that a conception of language that is ‘instrumentalist’ *as such* contrasts with any view which recognizes language as having a role in constituting intentionality.<sup>115</sup> Yet there is no reason to assume that these two determinations necessarily exclude one another, i.e. that conceiving of language in instrumental terms rules out its having a role in constituting meaning. Moreover, although some of Heidegger’s comments in *SZ* (Story A above) might be seen as aligning him to an extrinsic view of instrumentality, such a view is neither directly entailed by his characterization of language as ‘Equipmental’ nor obviously reconcilable with the role he attributes to routine language use in conceptual conditioning. For these reasons I will be interpreting Heidegger’s views as relying on a notion of linguistic instrumentality that allows a more intimate link between language use and meaning constitution.

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<sup>115</sup> This instrumentalist-constitutive contraposition is found, for example, in Taylor (1985, 1995), Guignon (1983) and Lafont (1999, 2001). In her illuminating discussion of the role of language in the German philosophical tradition Lafont (1999, 13-18) traces this distinction back to Humboldt.

## CHAPTER II

# MERLEAU-PONTY: THE EXPRESSIVE ASPECT OF LANGUAGE

Merleau-Ponty's approach to language is guided by his conviction that perception is a paradigmatic phenomenon that 'teaches us [...] the true conditions of objectivity' relevant to 'the present and living being' of cultural and historical phenomena such as language (*Primat* 67 f.). The influence of this paradigm is discernible in two defining characteristics of his conception of language. First, his views of perception and language both focus on the role of embodied finite agents. Merleau-Ponty does not, as Heidegger does, arrive at this focus through arguments against the coherence of the idea of transcendental subjectivity or its compatibility with phenomenology. Rather it was implicit from the start in his working assumption that a philosophical conception of subjectivity should reflect the findings of empirical biology and Gestalt psychology. But it led to similar commitments. Most notably, it led Merleau-Ponty to reject the 'prejudice of the world', the idea of an 'exact world, entirely determined' that is 'posited first' by 'objective thinking' (*PdP* 11, 39). The same motif is found in his later rejection of a fully explicit ideal language, or a 'language before language' (*PdM* 10), and clearly corresponds to Heidegger's rejection of transcendental subjectivity as the atemporal being – or 'constant remaining' (*SZ* 96) – of fully constituted eidetic relations. So the second defining characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's views is the rejection of what I shall call *final determinacy*, i.e. any state of determinacy that functions as the presupposed telos of intentionality. Eschewing this idea, the task for a philosophical conception of subjectivity or language becomes precisely to explicate how structures bearing determinate meaning are generated in actual experience – i.e. to be a 'phenomenology of the genesis' of such structures (*PdP* xiii).

This chapter will centre on the way Merleau-Ponty's resultant views on language and expression complement and modify the Heideggerian framework, in particular by explicating the idea of presentational sense. As with the preceding chapter's treatment of the Heideggerian framework, this discussion will operate at

two levels. The first two sections of this chapter – corresponding to the two defining characteristics just mentioned – draw primarily on *The Structure of Behaviour* (*SdC*) and *The Phenomenology of Perception* (*PdP*) to outline general features of Merleau-Ponty's conception of language. The first introduces his view of language as behaviour expressing the biologically and phenomenologically 'lived sense' of embodied agents. The second examines how Merleau-Ponty's view of intentional objects is shaped by his rejection of final determinacy and introduces his notion of 'indirect sense'. The next two sections concentrate on texts from the early 1950s and set out in greater detail the specific function that Merleau-Ponty supposes signs to have as bearers of indirect sense. This exegetic focus is explained by the fact – as should become clear – that Merleau-Ponty's views underwent significant development at this time through his assimilation of Saussurean ideas.<sup>116</sup> The third section therefore examines the structural and rational character of indirect sense suggested by Saussure's views, whereas the fourth draws on Merleau-Ponty's analogy with painting to shed light on its functioning, in particular its presentational function. The final section then explains how indirect sense can be taken as a phenomenologically plausible explication of the notion of presentational sense.

### 1. Language as the expression of lived sense

In *PdP* Merleau-Ponty characteristically introduces his view of linguistic expression by delimiting it from those he attributes to 'empiricism' and 'intellectualism' respectively. The 'empiricist' view thinks of language in terms of the causal efficacy (*existence effective*) of 'verbal images', or the 'traces' of previous language use (*PdP* 203). Because this affords no role to the speaking subject, Merleau-Ponty sees the 'intellectualist' position, according to which the meaning of linguistic utterances is constituted by the categorial operations of a pure thinking subject, as a modest improvement. Nevertheless, he objects that this – essentially Kantian – picture fails to account for the connection between thought and language: Although subjectivity is now involved, it is as the 'thinking subject' not the 'speaking subject'; thought has

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<sup>116</sup> My exegetic strategy thus differs from the common approaches of either periodizing Merleau-Ponty's views on language (e.g. Fontaine-de Visscher 1974, 17 f.; Silvermann 1981) or approaching them from the perspective of his late works (e.g. Dillon 1997; Madison 1981). Briefly this is because (a) Saussure's views introduce the most important systematic development to Merleau-Ponty's otherwise continuous view of how language functions; (b) despite attempts to reconceive the ontological picture, *VT*'s text and working notes provide no indication of a significant modification to this view.

meaning while ‘the word remains an empty envelope’, lacking ‘an efficacy of its own [*efficacité propre*]’ and functioning merely as an ‘exterior accompaniment’ of thought (*PdP* 206). Merleau-Ponty therefore concludes, somewhat enigmatically, that one surpasses both these positions through the ‘simple remark that the word has a sense [*sens*]’, which is to imply that ‘the word, far from being the simple sign of objects and of meanings, inhabits things and is the vehicle of meanings [*véhicule les significations*]’ (*PdP* 206, 207). This is of course a general point: Merleau-Ponty’s objection applies not only to the idea of a pure thinking subject, but to any postulated mode of meaning constitution that stands in a merely external relation to actual linguistic processes, i.e. to any view of language as an instrument in the extrinsic sense mentioned above (page 76), including attempts to construe linguistic signs simply as indications in the Husserlian sense (*PdP* 193, 211; cf. *PdM* 24).

Merleau-Ponty characterizes the more intimate link he discerns by observing that ‘thought tends towards expression as towards its completion’, such that ‘thought and expression are therefore constituted simultaneously’ (*PdP* 206, 213 f.). However, although there are certain experiences (e.g. literary writing) of which this Kleistian thought is perhaps literally true, such formulations are clearly challenging.<sup>117</sup> Is one supposed to be incapable of having a thought without vocalizing it? Is it not obviously wrong to suggest that ‘the thinking subject himself is in a sort of ignorance about his thoughts as long as he has not formulated them for himself or even said or written them’?<sup>118</sup> These claims are best interpreted not as simply reporting experience but criterially, as saying that what a thought is can be understood only in terms of its being expressed. The ‘tendency’ towards expression can then explained by the fact that the ability to express it in language is the best, and often the only, criterion of an agent’s having a certain thought. In this sense, to cite two of Merleau-Ponty’s own examples, the way thought ‘tends towards’ language is analogous to the way abilities to type or play a musical instrument are directed towards performance (*SdC* 131). In all these cases, just as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the relationship is one of culmination or accomplishment, such that a thought is nothing more precisely and more properly than its expression.

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<sup>117</sup> ‘The Frenchman says “l’appétit vient en mangeant” and this empirical principle remains true when one parodies it and says “l’idée vient en parlant”’ (Kleist 1990, 535).

<sup>118</sup> *PdP* 206. In one passage Merleau-Ponty goes as far as to suggest that ‘my [own] acts of speech surprise me’ (*S* 111).

This view is not without its difficulties. To begin with, it seems simply to paraphrase the claim that linguistic expression is the realization of thought with the tautology that linguistic behaviour wouldn't be what it is without the use of linguistic expressions. Nor is it clear that it improves on intellectualism's failure to account for the 'efficacité propre' of words. For the claim that thought tends towards expression leaves the linguistic articulation of a thought looking simply like a final cause and does nothing to establish a constitutive role for language in the *formation* of thoughts. So if the distinctiveness and potential appeal of Merleau-Ponty's position is to be understood, it is necessary to get clearer about the two aspects of what I shall call his *inherence requirement*: what is it for words to 'inhabit' things, or to be the 'vehicle' of significance?

Merleau-Ponty's answer centres on the idea of what I shall call *lived sense*. This has an underlying biological aspect, according to which language is a kind of 'incarnate sense'. Thus the realization of sense through the body, Merleau-Ponty says, comprises 'a primordial operation of meaning [*signification*] where the expressed does not exist apart from the expression', this being 'the central phenomenon of which body and spirit, sign and meaning are abstract aspects' (*PdP* 193). The emphasis in *PdP* on the body's explanatory importance, together with a suggestive reliance on subjectivist terminology, might give the impression that Merleau-Ponty's own position fails to meet the inherence requirement.<sup>119</sup> For instance, his descriptions of the body as 'a power of natural expression' which we see 'secreting in itself a "sense"' that it 'project[s] onto its material surroundings and communicates to others' (*PdP* 211, 230) might seem to imply that sense is constituted – so to speak, as a transcendental medium – by the body, and contingently externalized via linguistic signs. However, this impression can be dispelled by considering Merleau-Ponty's earlier work *The Structure of Behaviour* (*SdC*), which underlies many of his claims in *PdP*.<sup>120</sup> Comparing biological and physical systems Merleau-Ponty there talks of 'sense' as something implicit in the 'structure' of the interaction between a system and its surroundings (*SdC* 112 f.). Rather than straightforwardly tending towards physical equilibrium with the outside, he distinguishes organisms as having a complex 'structure' that enables them

<sup>119</sup> Though the limitations of such terminology were astutely criticized by Jean Bauffret as early as 1946 (cf. *Primat* 102 f.), Merleau-Ponty himself seems to have realized the need to develop an ontological picture appropriate to his views only much later. Cf. footnote 136.

<sup>120</sup> Waldenfels (1976, 1981) brings out this continuity well with regard to the notion of structure.

interactively to ‘constitute an environment of their own’, as comprising a ‘unity of meaning’ with behaviour coordinated by ‘*sense*’ rather than physical ‘laws’ (*SdC* 157, 169). So despite his suggestive formulations in *PdP*, Merleau-Ponty’s is not the subjectivist claim that the world acquires meaning (‘extrinsically’) in virtue of bodily sense-constitution projected outward by expressive acts. Rather, his idea is that sense is constituted by the *interaction* between an organism and its surroundings, that *behaviour* is so to speak the locus of sense, so that it is in virtue of being bodily behaviour that meaning is immanent in language.<sup>121</sup> It is this view of sense as a biological feature manifested in behaviour which underlies *PdP*’s talk of ‘incarnate sense’ and its claim that linguistic expression, as ‘living sense’, ‘presents, or rather [...] is the subject’s taking up a position in the world of its meanings’ (*PdP* 225).

With regard to language an important ramification of this notion of biologically lived sense is found. As Merleau-Ponty explains it in *PdP*, ‘below the conceptual meaning of acts of speech [*paroles*]’ there is an ‘existential meaning’ which they do not simply translate, but which ‘inhabits’ and ‘is inseparable’ from them (*PdP* 212). In making this distinction Merleau-Ponty relies on empirical findings from Gestalt psychology. Thus in arguing the need for an ‘existential theory’ of aphasia, he discusses patients who are unable to sort a series of samples into colour groups. Because for them red samples fail to stand out as forming a group, these patients are unable to subsume particular cases under the colour concept. In more general terms, characteristic of Gestalt psychology, in failing to discern general patterns or saliences within experience in the way normal subjects do, such patients lose the ability to apply the ‘categorical attitude’ to experience and remain stuck in the ‘concrete attitude’ (*PdP* 204 f., 222 f.). Despite this loss, however, such subjects reportedly retain the ability to use words where they are of ‘affective and vital interest’, leading Merleau-Ponty to distinguish between ‘the word as an instrument of action and as a means of disinterested denomination’ (*PdP* 204).

The simple absence of classificatory abilities contrasts with cases in which the categorical attitude is somehow preserved but fails to engage appropriately with its existential foundation. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this with the case of Schneider, a brain-damaged patient studied in detail by the Gestalt psychologists Gelb and Goldstein. Schneider’s impairment was such that his intellectual or judgemental

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<sup>121</sup> The notion of behaviour was taken as central to *SdC* precisely due to its neutrality between classical oppositions such as that between subject and object (*SdC* 2 f.; cf. 137).

faculties were at some level left intact: he showed ‘no sign of a weakening of general intelligence’ and retained the ability explicitly to subsume particulars under general concepts (*PdP* 228, 148). His difficulty was that this general intelligence no longer seemed attuned to human relevance. For instance, although motorically capable of ‘concrete’ movements – such as those habitually acquired, or reflex responses to pain – and able to understand instructions concerning ‘abstract’ movements simply to move his arm to a certain position, Schneider was unable to carry out the latter or, generally speaking, spontaneously to translate intellectual understanding into motoric action. In addition, Schneider manifested no sense of fictive or ‘virtual’ scenarios, nor of involvement in sexual or conversational interactions.<sup>122</sup> With regard to language he had difficulty in understanding simple analogies and metaphors, even where these deployed familiar words – familiarity which sometimes enabled him explicitly to reason out the analogy via their literal meanings (*PdP* 148 f.).

This distinction between the concrete and categorial, or existential and conceptual meaning, can be illuminated further by the corresponding distinction between ‘detachable’ (*amovible*) and ‘symbolic’ forms of behaviour discussed in *SdC* (115 ff., 130 ff.). Detachable forms of behaviour are already distinguished from straightforward ‘syncretic forms’, i.e. responses to stimuli that remain bound to ‘the material of certain concrete situations’, by being ‘relatively independent of the materials in which they realize themselves’ (*SdC* 115). Such behaviour involves a certain flexibility in responding purposively to given situations: e.g. chickens making relational sense of stimuli, rats choosing a shortest path without being confused by their initial direction, or chimpanzees exploiting the ‘instrumental value of an object’ (*SdC* 124). While such behaviours manifest some awareness of situations’ structure, ‘the animal cannot adopt a point of view chosen at discretion with regard to objects’ and hence ‘cannot recognize a same *thing* in different perspectives’ (*SdC* 127 f.). In sum, detachable forms are ‘behaviour adapted to the immediate and not to the virtual, to functional values and not to things’ (*SdC* 130). By contrast ‘the “thing structure”’ and ‘the sense of the virtual’ are made possible by and characterize ‘symbolic behaviour’ (*SdC* 128, 130). Here a ‘symbol’ is used to allow ‘substitutions of different points of view’, thus freeing “‘stimuli” from actual relations’ or the

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. in particular *PdP* 120 ff., 181 ff., 228-9. What Schneider lacked was the ability to ‘situate himself in the virtual’, ‘the power to project before him a sexual world, to put himself in an erotic situation’, or quite generally to ‘polarize’ the world in terms of significance (*PdP* 126, 182, 130).

‘functional values’ assigned to them by ‘the defined needs of the species’ (*SdC* 133). This type of feat, Merleau-Ponty further suggests, is explained by the ‘systematic principle’ inherent in a sign system along with the idea of a ‘structural correspondence’: ‘The true sign represents the signified [...] as long as its relation to other signs is the same as the relation of the object signified by it to other objects’ (*SdC* 132 f.).

At this point two important clarifications are possible. First, it is clearly symbolic behaviour that Merleau-Ponty has in mind in discussing the inherent sense of words in *PdP*. To be sure, both forms of behaviour manifest living or ‘biological sense’ (*SdC* 19), and this explains Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term ‘inhabitation’ to characterize the intimacy of bodily presence in the world.<sup>123</sup> In addition, as already hinted, the use of linguistic signs – the word as an instrument – is already possible in detachable or concrete behaviours. But whereas there the ‘vocal sign does not mediate any reaction to the general meaning of the stimulus’ (*SdC* 131), in symbolic behaviour the use of an expression is essential to cross-situational organization. Moreover, insofar as the articulation of thought is linked with the ‘systematic principle’ underlying a sign system, the means of mediation Merleau-Ponty suggests – although in itself in need of explication – would plausibly explain thought’s ‘tendency’ towards expression. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is only in symbolic behaviour that linguistic expressions mediate, i.e. are the vehicle of, sense; such behaviour does not ‘have’, but ‘is’ itself meaning [*signification*].<sup>124</sup>

Second, Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Schneider serves to highlight certain competences tacitly at work in normally engaged subjectivity. As such, the force of his claims does not rely on their reliability as empirical hypotheses, but on the use of this case as a paradigm exemplifying certain deficiencies – a role that might be equally well fulfilled by a fictive patient.<sup>125</sup> Thus in discussing various possibilities of disintegration Merleau-Ponty aims to show that to be (causally) effective in the sensible world intellectual capacities require ‘orientation’, i.e. they must connect with practically and emotionally significant features of lived experience. Corresponding to

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<sup>123</sup> E.g. *PdP* 162; cf. also 161 which similarly talks of the body ‘haunting’ its environment.

<sup>124</sup> This formulation of *SdC* 133 anticipates the distinction between ‘having’ (existential) sense and ‘being’ (predicative) sense of *PdP* 203n.

<sup>125</sup> As empirical claims of course, Merleau-Ponty’s interpretations of experiments might prove scientifically anachronistic; alternatively, the Schneider case might seem an inadequate inductive basis for his confident extrapolations. Indeed, the reliability of even that case might be questioned (cf. Gardner 1977, 142-151).



the concrete and categorial attitudes, this involves the distinct feats of picking out practically and emotionally significant features as figure-ground saliences in the lived world, and organizing these saliences into intellectual categories.<sup>126</sup> What makes Schneider's case of particular interest to Merleau-Ponty is that, despite embodying intellectualist philosophical assumptions about the nature of subjectivity, he remains recognizably dysfunctional as a human agent in lacking the overall ability to connect the categorial attitude properly with the concrete attitude. This powerfully illustrates Merleau-Ponty's claims that such 'orientation' is needed and that it must be understood as a bodily feat. The body 'is the condition of possibility [...] for all expressive operations' since – to generalize Merleau-Ponty's comments about the notion of space – talk of the 'body image' [*schéma corporel*] is 'a way of expressing that my body is in the world [...] one's own body is the third term, always implied, of the figure-ground structure'.<sup>127</sup>

Merleau-Ponty is clear, however, that 'the theory of language must make its way through to the experience of speaking subjects', so that the notion of lived sense also has a visible aspect: it is not simply lived through but experienced, phenomenological as well as biological.<sup>128</sup> Correspondingly, several features of Merleau-Ponty's conception of language seek to characterize our experience of language. Thus he highlights the transparent feel that language has in carrying our attention to the world, rather than opaquely fixing it on the signs used. The 'marvel of language', he says, is that we 'forget' it, that successful 'expression erases itself before what is expressed'.<sup>129</sup> In fact Merleau-Ponty considers this 'transparency' to be apparent rather than genuine, an effect of habitual familiarity not to be confused with attaining language-independent awareness of the world.<sup>130</sup> He further suggests that an act of

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<sup>126</sup> Taylor (1989, 4-8) emphasizes and illuminates the importance of such bodily orientation. Baldwin (2004, 12) correctly notes that bodily disorders such as Schneider's are 'not intelligible without reference to the body's contribution to experience'. However, the underlying point of Merleau-Ponty's discussion is that 'normal' experience too is intelligible only with this contribution.

<sup>127</sup> *PdP* 117, cf. 271. In the sense that it mediates the link between intellectual concepts and the sensory domain the '*schéma corporel*' might be viewed as analogous to Kant's schematism (Kant 1983a, 187 [B176] ff.). Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'orientation' is also reminiscent of Kant's appeal to subjective factors in geographical, mathematic and logical orientation (Kant 1983c, 270n).

<sup>128</sup> *PdM* 23. Given the content of *SdC* and *PdP*, Barbaras's (2005, 210 f.) claim that Merleau-Ponty's use of 'living' has the dual meaning of living and experiencing (i.e. *Leben/Erleben*, *vivre/vivre quelque chose*) is clearly plausible. My talk of 'lived sense' is therefore intended to allow this ambiguity.

<sup>129</sup> *PdP* 459; cf. similarly 221 and *PdM* 15, 58.

<sup>130</sup> *PdP* 219. Cf. *PdM* 43 and 156, which talks of the 'illusion of an absolutely transparent expression'.

speech (*la parole*) is ‘a true gesture’ containing its ‘sense’ in the same way as other gestures.<sup>131</sup> This has several connotations for Merleau-Ponty. One is active uptake: ‘The sense of gestures is not given but understood, that is, seized again by an act of the spectator’ (*PdP* 215). This disavows the behaviourist (or empiricist) idea that gestures might be learned passively by conditioning processes, but the phenomenology of such learning further implies that grasping a gesture, though spontaneous, is a nonintellectual act: ‘One day I “caught” the word [e.g.] “sleet” as one imitates a gesture [...]’; the word was ‘never inspected, analysed, known or constituted, but grabbed and taken on by a speaking power’; the ‘sense of a word’ is learnt like ‘the use of a tool, by seeing it employed in the context of a certain situation’ (*PdP* 461 f.; cf. 216). Moreover, gestures are grasped in relation to a form of life. As Merleau-Ponty points out, as humans we naturally have no sense of the ‘sexual mimicry’ of other species, yet if the sense of a gesture ‘were given to me as a thing’ it would not be clear ‘why my comprehension of gestures is for the most part limited to human gestures’ (*PdP* 215). These phenomenological claims reflect Merleau-Ponty’s general (biological) view that the sense inherent in embodied behaviour is due to the way the world is presented in the optic of the organism’s vitality: ‘Behavioural gestures [...] do not pick out [*ne visent pas*] the true world or pure being, but being for the animal [...] a certain manner of dealing with the world, of “being in the world”’.<sup>132</sup> But since even sexual or otherwise affective (e.g. anger) behaviours are not transcultural constants, the form of life to which gestures relate is also modulated by cultural factors. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, such behaviours are ‘invented’ just as words are and ‘transcend’ the body’s ‘simply biological being’ to ‘create meanings that are transcendent with regard to the anatomical arrangement and yet immanent in behaviour’ (*PdP* 220 f.). Thus it is in relation to a human blend of nature and culture that the ‘phonetic gesture [...] realizes for the speaking subject and for those listening a certain structuration of experience’ (*PdP* 225).

Two general features of this assimilation of language to gestural communication should be highlighted. The first – reflected in the expression ‘to gesture at’ something – is that gestures are more a matter of intimation than fully

<sup>131</sup> *PdP* 214. Incidentally, Merleau-Ponty’s talk of ‘gestural meaning’ – as ‘immanent within speech’ and the basis of ‘conceptual meaning’ (*PdP* 209) – is clearly intended to be synonymous with ‘existential meaning’ (*PdP* 225).

<sup>132</sup> *SdC* 136. The basis of this view is Merleau-Ponty’s critique of behaviourism, centring on the idea that the individuation of environmental stimuli (perceptual ‘givens’) depends on an organism’s internal functioning (cf. *SdC* 1-64).

determinate presentation.<sup>133</sup> Extended to language, this means that ‘once “acquired”’ a word’s sense is ‘just as precise and just as little definable as the sense of a gesture. [...] The consciousness that conditions language is merely a global and inarticulate grasp of the world’ (*PdP* 462 f.). The second feature is closely connected: although a gesture only ‘outlines [*dessine en pointillé*] an intentional object’, this ‘object becomes actual and is fully understood when my body’s powers adjust to and recover it’ (*PdP* 215 f.). Thus, in keeping with *PdP*’s overall focus on the body, the second feature is that gestures are fundamentally bodily behaviours. In this respect Merleau-Ponty likens gestures to perceptible things, the identity of which ‘through perceptual experience is merely another aspect of the identity of one’s own body’, and which comprise ‘a system of equivalences [...] under examination by a bodily presence’ (*PdP* 216).

There is, however, one feature that Merleau-Ponty sees distinguishing language from other kinds of gesture: ‘speech is capable of becoming sedimented and constituting an intersubjective acquisition’ – ‘in the case of speech the expressive operation can be iterated indefinitely’ (*PdP* 221 f.). Because expressed concepts or thoughts can be reused or taken up (*repris*), one is able to ‘overcome the temporal dispersion of the phases of thought’, meaning that ‘speech is precisely the act through which thought eternalizes itself as truth’ (*PdP* 441, 445). This interplay of speech and sedimentation is intended to address an enduring central requirement of Merleau-Ponty’s overall metaphysical picture by accounting for the genesis of the ‘mental landscape’ in lived experience, i.e. by indicating how the mode of being of explicit ideas is constitutively linked with acts performed by embodied subjects.<sup>134</sup> Merleau-Ponty further believes that the phenomenon of sedimentation also distinguishes language from other forms of expression, such as music or painting. The difference, as presented in *PdP*, is that whereas acts of speech consciously take up and are founded on previous acts of linguistic expression, music and painting do not depend on antecedent acts of expression, so that ‘each artist takes up his task from the beginning’ (*PdP* 221). An obvious objection to this – that an artist’s work is similarly conditioned by the personal, historical, and discursive situation – is accommodated by

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<sup>133</sup> This feature – to be discussed in the sequel – makes the mode of gestural expression appropriate to the ‘principle of indeterminacy’ that in Merleau-Ponty’s view pervasively characterizes human existence (*PdP* 197).

<sup>134</sup> *PdP* 217. Merleau-Ponty requires: ‘What one calls an “idea” is necessarily linked to an act of expression and owes to this its appearance of autonomy’ (*PdP* 447; cf. 212 and *VI* 196 ff.).

his later concession that painting too is *capable of* sedimentation (*PdM* 139 ff.). Refining his earlier claim, Merleau-Ponty now suggests a distinction between sedimentation that ‘accumulates’ and sedimentation which ‘integrates’. Unlike painting, which ‘accumulates’ or juxtaposes its productions over history, language is to ‘integrate’, i.e. preserve and develop, its past products and so to establish the realm of ‘integral’ truths (*PdM* 142 f.). This distinction is motivated by Merleau-Ponty’s conviction that the development of language is animated by the aim of establishing stable bodies of truth, and that this requires ‘integration’, with the result that whereas sedimentation is *possible* for painting, it *necessarily* shapes linguistic expression.

Against this background it is possible to identify two basic problems with Merleau-Ponty’s views around the time of *PdP* which would be improved on by his subsequent appropriation of Saussurean ideas. The first is that although the notion of biologically and phenomenologically lived sense explains in some detail how words are ‘inhabited’ by sense, Merleau-Ponty’s early view of how they are the ‘vehicle’ of sense is less developed. To be sure, in telling us that expression realizes thought and that language builds up a stable matrix of ‘sedimented’ relations Merleau-Ponty hints at how words are the bearer – and in this sense the vehicle – of meaning. Furthermore, in *SdC* he had appealed to the ‘systematic principle’ underlying relations between signs to explain their mediative role in symbolic behaviour. But his early attempts to explicate further how words are involved in the mechanics of articulating thought – what exactly their ‘*efficacité propre*’ consists in – are less than convincing. This can be seen in a passage evincing *PdP*’s view of how syntactic and lexical forms bear their meaning. Arguing against the idea that linguistic signs are conventional, Merleau-Ponty picturesquely suggests that if one takes into account their ‘gestural sense’, ‘words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of singing the world’ (*PdP* 218). He expands on this with the hypothetical suggestion that, if it were possible to eliminate all ‘mechanical’ phonetic rules, foreign-language influence, and grammatical rationalizations from a language, the result would be an ‘emotional essence’, a ‘somewhat reduced system of expression’ in which, say, ‘it is not arbitrary to call light “light” if one calls night “night”’ (*PdP* 218). In the analogy with singing and language’s supposed emotionally expressive core it is not difficult to discern echoes of Condillac and Rousseau’s, and even Herder’s, speculations concerning the

origin of language.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, it is tempting to doubt the coherence of this hypothetical construction and to object that stripped of grammatical and phonetic regularities a language would not be a *system* of expression at all; further that by lacking systematicity it would also lack the means to be genuinely expressive. But, even indulging Merleau-Ponty's hypothesis, it is difficult to see the claim that pairs of words, such as 'lumière' and 'nuit', stand in some deep-seated *emotional* contrast as anything more than an article of faith. Whatever the attractions of this view, it is hardly a convincing characterization of linguistic representation. The fact, say, that tables are distinguished from chairs, or light from dark, and correspondingly referred to with different general terms is surely a perceptive or cognitive response to the world rather than an 'emotional' one. Merleau-Ponty's motivation for these claims can nonetheless be understood and is revealing. As his discussion of the relationship between 'existential' and 'conceptual' meaning makes clear, he is attempting to identify preconceptual aspects of language that would parallel his critique of objective thinking about perception. His aim, here as there, is to describe the 'prepredicative' level of 'operant intentionality' (*PdP* xiii). However, lacking the conceptual means to do this convincingly, in *PdP* he resorts to vague and clearly inadequate metaphors – 'singing the world', 'emotional gesticulation' (*PdP* 219) – suggested by his overall somatocentric perspective and vague analogies with artistic expression. As a result *PdP* ultimately fails in its aspiration to articulate what it is for linguistic signs to be a 'vehicle' of meaning.

The second basic problem is that *PdP*'s assimilation of language to other bodily behaviour obscures its ontological character. This can be seen by considering a passage describing the persistence of linguistic entities, i.e. words, over time, which compares 'the presence [...] of the words I know' with that of perceptible objects and perceptive horizons. For words to endure, Merleau-Ponty suggests, it 'suffices that I possess its articulatory and acoustic essence as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body' (*PdP* 210). However, since words are routinely longer lived than the 'fleeting hold' (*prise glissante*; *PdP* 462) that mortal subjects have on them, this clearly cannot be the whole story. Merleau-Ponty recognizes this in

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<sup>135</sup> Particularly Rousseau's view that 'the first languages were singing and impassioned' – a view also hinted at by Condillac (1971, 180-1) – and only later acquired grammatical structure (Rousseau 1990 67, 73). The claim that certain (linguistic) sounds naturally express feelings, passions, or emotions is common not only to Condillac (1971, 172, 228 f., 237) and Rousseau (1990, 114, 126), but also – at least with words for things lacking characteristic sounds – to Herder (1966, 57).

criticizing Descartes' failure to consider the importance of acquired language – the 'spoken cogito' – and underlining the 'power of language' to make things 'exist' and to open up 'new dimensions, new landscapes to thought'. However, he then brushes aside the idea, as he puts it, that language 'envelops us', suggesting that this would be to 'forget half the truth' (*PdP* 460). Merleau-Ponty himself focuses one-sidedly on this other half of the truth, that presupposed by explicit language use, which he enigmatically refers to as 'a tacit cogito', 'a silence of consciousness that envelops the speaking world'. He characterizes this as 'a motoric presence', such that a word's 'generality is not that of the idea, but that of a style of behaviour which my body "understands"' (*PdP* 461 f.).

But here a tension in Merleau-Ponty's account emerges. On the one hand, if the tacit cogito's motoric presence is individuated so as to correspond to individual bodies, then its existence is equally 'fleeting' or transient and a more sophisticated account of linguistic entities' persistence is required – i.e. of how the horizontal structure of language is distributed over many speakers and equally many tacit cogitos. On the other hand, there are some passages in which Merleau-Ponty stresses the distributed, or transindividual, character of language: 'The sense of a word [...] is above all the aspect it takes on in a human experience [...]. It is a meeting of the human and inhuman, it is like a behaviour of the world' (*PdP* 462). If, as such passages seem to suggest, the tacit cogito's motoric presence is an aspect of the world-as-agent, it surely would provide a context sufficiently comprehensive to account for the horizontal structure of language. But the price would be to obscure and perhaps destroy the force of Merleau-Ponty's methodological and explanatory reliance on lived experience: for it would then be unclear in what relation the tacit cogito's motoric presence stands to that of individual bodies, and indeed in what sense the tacit cogito is a 'cogito'. This tension is part of a general problem with *PdP*'s exclusive focus on the body as a transcendental explanans. Presumably it is such tensions that eventually led Merleau-Ponty to seek an ontology more suited to his views and so to a decentred metaphysical idiom.<sup>136</sup> But it is particularly acute with regard to language. For the attempted reduction of linguistic entities to motoric

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<sup>136</sup> Including explicit rejection of the 'tacit cogito' (*VI* 222, 227). – While it seems correct to claim that this development was necessitated by certain aspects of his thinking – e.g. his treatments of expression or nature (cf. Barbaras 1993, 2005) – it seems to me that the need extends back to *SdC*'s attempts to clarify the relationship between nature and consciousness using an ontologically undetermined notion of behaviour.

presence is latently subjectivist, fails to acknowledge that linguistic objects' mode of persistence differs from that (say) of physical objects, and fails to distinguish linguistic sense from that of other embodied behaviours. These defects all indicate the ontological evanescence of language in *PdP*, which fails not only to characterize the linguistic horizon specifically, but even to acknowledge that language is a distinct kind of horizon with its own ontological import.

Finally, Merleau-Ponty's views should be distinguished from some conceptions of expression that are common, particularly in aesthetics. To begin with it contrasts with the view that 'expression' is primarily about externalizing emotions or other subjective states. Despite *PdP*'s emphasis on 'emotional' and bodily significance, Merleau-Ponty always conceived of expression as a complex function, occurring at the subject-object interface of behaviour and shaped by the 'system "me-others-things"' (*PdP* 69; cf. *PdM* 95). So although this clearly emerges only in later attempts to develop a decentred ontological picture, it is *at least* an *implication* of Merleau-Ponty's approach – from *SdC* onwards – that expression has multiple inputs and is not specifically concerned with the externalization of subjective states.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, his view of expression as the 'realization' of thought cannot be thought of as contrasting with representation or the literal.<sup>138</sup> It therefore differs not only from the simplistic view of expression as flowing from a person's 'feelings or his character', but also from more refined views that distinguish expressive properties, say, as 'those properties of art works (or natural objects) whose names also designate intentional states of persons', as contrasting with a work's 'representational properties', or as 'metaphorically exemplified' in contrast to those properties (e.g. consisting of certain colours, shapes etc.) a work literally exemplifies.<sup>139</sup> For insofar as linguistic expression effects the *formulation* or embodiment of thoughts, it obviously cannot be opposed to the cognitively relevant and hence precedes distinctions between the literal and the metaphorical, or representation and

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<sup>137</sup> Though he continued to talk of linguistic 'gestures', after *PdP* Merleau-Ponty no longer refers to them as 'emotional'. Moreover, it is precisely the view of modern art as self-expression that his theory of expression sought to overcome (cf. *PdM* 76 ff. and section 4.(i) below).

<sup>138</sup> Collingwood (1958, 122) similarly holds that 'a person who expresses something thereby becomes conscious of what it is that he is expressing'. He also parallels Merleau-Ponty in likening language to gestures and in his (similarly misleading) account of linguistic expression as founded in emotional meaning (cf. Collingwood 1958, 243, 225 ff.).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Carnap 1935, 27 ; Tormey 1971, 128; Wollheim 1992, 12 ff.; Goodman 1976, 85 respectively.

expression. Thus overall Merleau-Ponty's conception of expression is of a very general kind, corresponding to that found in Dilthey and underlying Heidegger's formal indication. Its concern is with what Charles Taylor (1985, 238) describes as 'expressive power, the power to make things manifest', where 'what is made manifest is not exclusively, not even mainly, the self, but a world'.

## 2. Creative expression and the aspectual presence of language

A pervasive motif in Merleau-Ponty's discussions is his likening of linguistic to artistic expression. Already in *PdP* (213) painting and music are appealed to as uncontroversial examples of expression in which sense is inherently realized. But the model of artistic expression subsequently assumed a more central role in Merleau-Ponty's discussions of language, finding its most extensive treatment in the discussions of literary expression and painting in *The Prose of the World* (*PdM*). This model has an intuitive link with what Merleau-Ponty sees as a basic distinction between two different modes of expression. In presenting this distinction among acts of speech (*parole*) Merleau-Ponty's terminology varies: he refers to 'authentic' and 'constituted' speech, speech that is 'original' or 'secondary', 'speaking' or (already) 'spoken', and finally 'transcendental' or 'empirical' speech. Nevertheless, rather than hinting at a rich typology of kinds of speech, in each of these pairings the first term refers to acts in which 'new sense' is generated as opposed to reusing previously available 'sedimented' sense.<sup>140</sup> This tendency is perhaps at its clearest in the distinction between 'original' speech, which Merleau-Ponty exalts as 'the primordial function of expression', and 'secondary' speech (*PdP* 446). However, the message common to these terminological variants is that a certain mode of language use is philosophically primary: that to *say* something is, properly speaking, to say something *new*; to speak 'authentically' is to create new sense; this being the 'transcendental' mode of expression that forms the paradigmatic act in relation to which all speech must be understood. To avoid both terminological confusion and

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<sup>140</sup> The distinction between 'authentic speech' – which 'gives rise to a new sense' (*PdP* 226) – and 'secondary expression' occurs first (*PdP* 207n). Authentic speech is then referred to as 'original speech' (*PdP* 208n), which in turn is counterposed with the 'constituted speech' of 'everyday life' that presupposes 'the decisive step of expression' (*PdP* 214; cf. 253). Authentic speech is further linked with 'speaking speech' ('the significative intention finds itself *in statu nascendi*') as opposed to 'spoken speech' (*PdP* 229). Further contrapositions between 'secondary speech' and 'original speech', as well as between 'empirical speech' ('the word as an acoustic phenomenon') and 'transcendental or authentic speech' are found at *PdP* 446 and 448 respectively.



implicit acceptance of Merleau-Ponty's primacy claims, the following discussion will, however, refer to the two modes of speech distinguished by the use of old and new sense as *established* and *creative* expression respectively.<sup>141</sup>

Merleau-Ponty describes these two modes of expression as differing phenomenologically. Whereas already 'spoken language' 'disappears before the sense of which it has become the bearer', 'speaking language' is to lead one 'from the signs to the sense', i.e. makes one aware of signs' mediation (*PdM* 17). To illustrate what this amounts to he concentrates on literary experience as a model. Although this phenomenon relies on the use of established words, Merleau-Ponty likens communally shared language to an 'anonymous corporality' which conveys others to us only schematically or 'in general'.<sup>142</sup> At the same time in 'speaking' speech it is susceptible to small modulations, a 'coherent deformation' of established language, that Merleau-Ponty characterizes using the notion of 'style'.<sup>143</sup> In literary experience, according to Merleau-Ponty, we see that the words used by a writer, such as Stendhal, are to have been 'subjected to a secret torsion' investing them with 'new sense' (*PdM* 19). The 'moment of expression', he says, occurs when the 'book takes possession of the reader', who responds by acquiring, for example, 'Stendhal's language' (*PdM* 20).

Now it might be disputed that this is a representative description of linguistic, or even literary, experience. However, whatever else the experience involves, perhaps it is plausible that in literature we are exposed to and become to some extent familiar with an author's idiolect. Yet, if this is allowed, what exactly distinguishes creative expression as philosophically primary? Merleau-Ponty sometimes relies on the idea of genetic priority, such that creative expression's primacy lies simply in that established uses of language must at some time have been initiated: first use is original, established use is derivative. Indeed he often suggests that reusing linguistic expressions in a previously established sense is not really to say anything at all, and

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<sup>141</sup> Though it should be noted that such terminological variations could be seen as reflecting Merleau-Ponty's view of indirect sense, since 'truly expressive speech [...] feels its way around an intention to signify' (*PdM* 64), so to speak circling in on an idea, rather than purporting to capture it directly with univocal terminology.

<sup>142</sup> *PdM* 195. For Merleau-Ponty the initial impression of possessing a common language is approximative, superficial, or perhaps even illusory: 'We speak and we understand each other, at least at first sight' (*PdM* 32).

<sup>143</sup> *PdM* 85, cf. 84 and *PdP* 209. See Frank (1999a, 1999b) for an interesting development of the nature and philosophical relevance of (ultimately) individual style which, though not drawing on it directly, is very much in line with Merleau-Ponty's thinking.

that really, truly, or properly ('speakingly') to say something means forging new meaning.<sup>144</sup> This sometimes translates into a pejorative attitude towards noncreative expression, reminiscent of Heidegger's treatment of routine language use (*Gerede*): The previously 'constituted speech' of 'everyday life' presupposes 'expression's decisive step', established ways of speaking are 'banal', 'already formed meanings' which 'excite in us only secondary thoughts' (*PdP* 214).

But Merleau-Ponty also relies on a more important, transcendental line of thought, which I shall call the *new sense argument*. Thus he assumes (quite reasonably) that unless the phenomenon of communication is to be an illusion, speakers must be able to learn something new from utterances. To explain this fact without appealing to an antecedently constituted realm of meanings such as transcendental subjectivity or a 'pure language' requires, in Merleau-Ponty's view, an account of how 'new sense' is constituted (*PdP* 208; *PdM* 12 f.). However, as the conditions of intelligibility of speech are effectively the same from the first and third personal perspectives – literary experience reminds us that 'to speak to and to be spoken to' is 'the same thing' (*PdM* 197) – the new sense argument applies not only to communication, but also to the expression of one's own thoughts.<sup>145</sup> Reflecting this thought, that both communication and thinking rely on creative expression, Merleau-Ponty proposes that 'the fundamental fact of expression' is that the signifier makes possible reference to a signified which 'exceeds' or 'transcends' it.<sup>146</sup> Speech he describes as the 'paradoxical operation' which uses 'already available meanings' to realize 'an intention which on principle goes beyond and modifies, in the final analysis itself fixes, the sense of the words by which it is translated' (*PdP* 445 f.).

As arguments for the philosophical primacy of creative expression these are unconvincing. First, the importance of genetic priority is counterbalanced in the – integrating, sedimentary – case of language by the fact, as Merleau-Ponty freely concedes, that creative expression itself relies on taking up 'already available meanings, the result of previous acts of expression'.<sup>147</sup> But if established language is just as essential to new sense constitution as vice versa, their relationship is clearly one of interdependence rather than one-sided priority. In addition, the new sense

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *PdM* 30, 21. Also the curious suggestion that to 'say something important' implies saying something original that 'imposes' its sense (*PdP* 445, cf. 460).

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *S* 113 f. Thus coinciding with the idea that thought is realized in linguistic expression.

<sup>146</sup> *S* 112. Merleau-Ponty talks of 'excès' at *PdP* 447, *PdM* 9, 24, and *S* 104, 112; and of 'transcendence' at *PdP* 449.

<sup>147</sup> *PdP* 213, cf. also 217 and *PdM* 20.

argument, as Merleau-Ponty presents it, is faulted. To begin with it trades on an ambiguity as to whether learning ‘something new’ means new facts or new ways of saying things. Yet once disambiguated it is obvious that learning new facts does not entail learning new ways of using words, leaving it far from clear that new sense constitution is needed to explain, say, the phenomenon of communication. Despite these arguments’ inadequacies, however, it is true that Merleau-Ponty’s overall position structurally requires an account of new sense constitution, since his rejection of final determinacy commits him to explicating how determinate meaning is generated in actual experience. This structural need, which both *SdC* and *PdP* seek to address, can be seen to underlie Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on both the inherent realization of sense in expression and creative expression. Indeed it also explains some of the more obscure features of Merleau-Ponty’s views, such as his interest in the emergence of the ‘first word’ from the ‘silence’ underlying language – again echoing the Condillac-Rousseau-Herder tradition’s speculations about the origin of language – and his somewhat mischievous suggestion that philosophical reflection on language should foster awareness of the ‘paradox of expression’ and the ‘mystery’ of language.<sup>148</sup>

Now while it is perhaps helpful to understand why Merleau-Ponty focused on creative, and in particular artistic, expression, for the present purposes it actually matters very little whether or not creative expression is thought of as explanatorily primary. Rather than being thought of as identifying a transcendental, original or authentic function of language, Merleau-Ponty’s discussions can here be thought of simply as shedding light on certain kinds of language use. Nonetheless, to understand what these are and how they explicate the notion of presentational sense, it is necessary to consider the distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ – or ‘lateral’ – sense which Merleau-Ponty links with established and creative expression respectively.

The idea of ‘indirect’ sense is central to Merleau-Ponty’s discussions of language after *PdP*. He introduces it as contrasting with the ‘direct sense’ of ‘already acquired expressions’, which ‘corresponds point for point to the turns, the forms, of instituted

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<sup>148</sup> On the former cf. *PdM* 60 f., *PdP* 217 and 462 f.; on the latter *PdM* 160, 162, 165 and *PdP* 448 f. Emphasizing the fact that language expresses something which did not antecedently exist as ‘paradox’ or ‘mystery’ can be interpreted as urging a pious attitude towards the ineffability of the ‘silence’ underlying language (e.g. by Kwant 1966, 184-191).

words'. It is the 'sense of expressions in the course of making themselves [*en train de se faire*]', resulting 'from the commerce of words themselves', that is 'lateral' or 'indirect' (*PdM* 64 f.; cf. *S* 53). Although this direct-indirect distinction clearly corresponds to that between established and creative expression, what exactly is meant by 'indirect' sense is difficult to pin down. This is perhaps partly because some of the relevant texts were incomplete and only published posthumously, but also because Merleau-Ponty clearly applies the label to several theses. Thus the 'indirectness' of linguistic meaning variously refers to the fact that signs play a role in mediating awareness of the world, alludes to the Saussurean emphasis on differences between signs, including its holism, and hints at the unspoken, implicit content of linguistic acts. The following two sections of this chapter will have task of exploring the positive aspects of this view. However, to understand the demarcation intended by the label 'indirect', it will be helpful to begin by focusing on what he is rejecting, i.e. by asking: What does Merleau-Ponty mean by 'direct' sense?

This question is complicated by equivocation in Merleau-Ponty's use of the term 'direct'. In the definition just quoted 'directness' simply denotes conformity to established or 'instituted' patterns of language use. Merleau-Ponty takes such conformity to characterize both everyday language use and mathematical or 'algorithmic' thinking (*PdP* 214; *PdM* 180). In contrast to what he considers the 'fundamental fact of expression' this makes both of these 'secondary' phenomena as they fail to exploit the expressive potential of terms and leave signs functioning as 'simple indices of univocal thought' (*PdP* 446). However, despite thus attempting to downplay its importance for a philosophical conception of language, Merleau-Ponty clearly accepts that linguistic sense can be 'direct' in this way.

The same cannot be said of a second, highly consequential, demarcation Merleau-Ponty makes with the term 'direct'. This concerns the implications of the paradigm of perception, specifically Merleau-Ponty's rejection of final determinacy, on the mode of givenness of intentional objects.<sup>149</sup> The intended demarcation is most succinctly expressed in the statement that all perception is 'indirect or even inverted in relation to an ideal of adequation which it presumes, but which it does not look at face on' (*RdC* 12). The *ideal* of adequation relied on here is Husserl's view of it as the sum total of all possible experiential 'evidences' in relation to the perceived

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<sup>149</sup> These implications are brought out well by Charron's (1972, 69-138) insightful exposition of Merleau-Ponty's views on language.

object.<sup>150</sup> By thus integrating over all possible perceptions, such an ideal is supposed to eliminate perspectival properties and become something like the ‘full’ (or ‘absolute’) presence of the object. In Merleau-Ponty’s view remaining true to lived experience means rejecting this kind of idealization, so that perception ‘can only be grasped via certain of its parts or certain of its aspects’ (*Primat* 49). And while this clearly echoes Husserl’s analysis of perception in terms of ‘adumbrations’ (*Abschattungen*), Merleau-Ponty differs decisively in assuming no fully present and fully determinate object as its telos. Instead Merleau-Ponty attempts to conceive of the functioning of language without reference to such an ideal, underlining that ‘it is necessary to see [...] that [the act of] meaning [*la signification*] does not transcend the *factual presence* of signs’ (*PdM* 148 f.). His approach therefore takes a ‘*decentring as the foundation of sense*’ – ‘the thing is not frontal’, but ‘given in an indirect grasp’ (*PdM* 63n). This mirrors his view of the ‘perceived thing’ as ‘an open totality’, ‘an indefinite number of perspective views that match up according to a certain style, a style which defines the object concerned’ (*Primat* 49). Indeed such emphasis on the openness, or ongoing processuality, of intentional phenomena is a hallmark of Merleau-Ponty’s thinking overall: perception is an ‘open field’, human experience an ‘open totality whose synthesis cannot be achieved’, the world even an ‘open unity’ or ‘incomplete work’.<sup>151</sup> The second sense of ‘indirectness’ is therefore to preclude reliance on the idea of idealized ‘fully present’ intentional objects.

It might be objected that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception is faulted and so cannot be generalized in this way. After all, in the case of perception of a physically present object the goal of adequation seems to be underwritten by the existence of a material substrate. So although an object is only ever perceived perspectivally (in ‘adumbrations’), it seems reasonable, necessary even, to posit a kind of direct (physical) presence that underwrites the idea of adequacy. So one might object that Merleau-Ponty’s view fails to acknowledge a key feature of perception, viz. that it is a *pars pro toto* operation in which experienced adumbrations relate to a determinate whole. Whatever the case may be with perception, there is a disanalogy which, I suggest, makes his conclusions more convincing in the case of language. For unless one is a platonist it is not clear what could correspond here to the physical

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<sup>150</sup> For Husserl’s view of ‘adequate evidence’ as the consummation, or complete sum, of relative experiential ‘evidences’, cf. Husserl 1992d, 16 [§6].

<sup>151</sup> *RdC* 12; *PdP* 254, 465. As highlighted by Waldenfels (1976), this emphasis on the openness of structure and human behaviour goes back to *SdC* (cf. 125).

object as a determinate whole. Hence, whether or not one agrees with his analysis of sense perception, Merleau-Ponty seems right to highlight that the intentional objects of linguistic discourse cannot generally be thought of as having a direct, fully determinate, presence in the world. This has the profound consequence that on Merleau-Ponty's view there is no such thing as a fully 'adequate' saying of what is meant. Or rather, the term 'adequacy' no longer makes sense: Because the presence of thoughts in the world is realized in linguistic expression, the implication is that thought itself is constitutively indirect, aspectual, or perspectival.<sup>152</sup> Fully representing 'content' in language is impossible – 'expression is never total' – precisely because there is no such thing as full content.<sup>153</sup>

Many of Merleau-Ponty's claims about language respond to a need to reinterpret the 'representational' function of language entailed by this repudiation of direct statement of thoughts. One example is his rejection of the idea of a language 'of things' themselves (cf. *PdM* 7-8, 92 f.). The thought behind this is presumably that a full direct presentation of objects would make sense of language's accountability to its objects, and enable it 'in principle' to represent them fully. But Merleau-Ponty's disavowal of the adequacy ideal implies that there is no aperspectival object of accountability, so that '*the very idea of adequate expression, that of a signifier which comes to cover exactly the signified*' becomes 'inconsistent' (*PdM* 42). Linguistically expressed thoughts, on this model, constitute not a presence but an absence, a 'determinate void', such that 'the meanings in speech are always ideas in the Kantian sense, the poles of a certain number of convergent acts of expression which magnetize discourse without for their part being properly given' (*S* 112). As a consequence, precision of expression must be understood without recourse to an ideal standard. Linguistic expression can no longer be thought of as gravitating towards unequivocally determinate thoughts or structures. Instead it serves to shut down indeterminacy, constraining possible interpretations sufficiently for equivocation, to all intents and purposes, to be eliminated: 'the very idea of

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<sup>152</sup> The view that language should be modelled on perception, realizes (or 'constitutes') thought, and is hence perspectival in character was later (1960) echoed by Gadamer (1990, 451 ff.). For a lucid contemporary discussion of intentionality as perspectival see chapter 1 of Crane 2001, especially pp. 4-8, 18-21.

<sup>153</sup> *S* 112, cf. 54. – Note that this is not simply about limits of 'representation', but a constraint on the mode of presence of what is 'represented'. A photo of a house, for example, is limited in the sense that it depicts only one view of it; the indirect objects of language are akin to the painting of a fictive house, which is not only depicted from one viewpoint but exists in no other.

*accomplished expression* is chimerical: what we call [accomplished expression] is successful communication'; 'all expression is perfect to the degree that it is *understood unequivocally*'.<sup>154</sup> Thus the ideal of fully determinate presence yields to the pragmatic criterion of successful communication as a standard of univocity.

Merleau-Ponty seems to have thought of the two senses of directness distinguished here as connected. In cases 'where it *seems* to us that what is expressed is itself attained [...] it is simply that the gesture is habitual, that our take up is immediate, and that it does not demand from us any reorganization of our ordinary operations' (*PdM* 43; italics added). It is fairly simple to see how this association might arise: when talking in established ways communication generally succeeds, so that it can seem that we are somehow speaking the language of things themselves.<sup>155</sup> But even if they suggest one another in this way, it is important to be clear that the two notions of directness are quite distinct: one concerns the relation to established regularities, the other to an idealized presence of thoughts. At the same time, there is a common feature in that both hint at a standard of determinacy, or univocity: in the first case direct sense appears to be unequivocally laid out in ('corresponds point for point to') established patterns of language use in which there are no 'gaps' (*lacunes*); in the second case direct sense lies in conformity to the fully determinate presence of (intentional) objects – an 'eidetics of language [...] of univocal relations susceptible, in their structure as in their functioning, to total explication' (*S* 105 f.). Thus 'directness' also implies a lack of equivocation or ambiguity, so that a further point to Merleau-Ponty's talk of 'indirectness' is to signal the absence of an objective standard of determinacy in language use.<sup>156</sup>

In summary, then, Merleau-Ponty's talk of the 'indirectness' of linguistic sense stands for three (independent) theses, each marking the demarcation from a certain sense of 'directness': 'Indirect' sense is not explicable (a) in terms of established rules of language use; (b) in terms of an ideal of representational

<sup>154</sup> *PdM* 41; *S* 112 (italics added), cf. also 114. – On the 'inadequate' character of linguistic expression see further also *PdM* 52 f., 79.

<sup>155</sup> 'It always seems to us that the processes of experience codified in our language follow the very articulations of being because it is through [our language] that we learn to direct ourselves to [being]' (*PdM* 38).

<sup>156</sup> In this respect the terms 'indirect' and 'lateral' correspond to the earlier emphasis on 'ambiguity', which, apart from an occasional distinction between 'good' and 'bad' ambiguity (e.g. *Éloge* 14; *Inédit* 409), disappears after *PdP*. Perhaps this is because, as Sapontzis (1978, 542) has pointed out, in presupposing determinate meanings between which it prevails, the idea of ambiguity is ill-suited to Merleau-Ponty's thinking.

adequacy; (c) in relation to an ideal standard of univocity. This, of course, tells us only what indirect sense is not. The following two sections will examine some of its positive aspects with a view to explicating the idea of presentational sense identified in chapter I.

Before doing so, this is a convenient point to highlight how the views set out in the last two sections fit into or augment the Heideggerian framework's general picture of language. Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's approaches to language obviously have a lot in common. Both take concrete, finite agency – 'In-der-Welt-sein' and 'être-au-monde' respectively – and lived experience as a starting point, while aiming to overcome the basic opposition of subject-object dualism. In addition both see predicative awareness as founded in something prepredicative on which their respective analyses focus: just as objective Things are founded in purposive Equipment for Heidegger, for Merleau-Ponty conceptual meaning is founded in existential meaning. Given this compatibility in approach, Merleau-Ponty's reliance on the model of perception brings two important revisions to the Heideggerian picture previously outlined. First, Merleau-Ponty makes clear that embodiment is an essential aspect of finite agency, reminding us, so to speak, that Dasein is flesh and blood. Second, his repudiation of final determinacy leads to a view of intentional objects as indirect presences and constitutively open horizons unified by a certain style, rather than determinate full presences. The distinctiveness of this view can be highlighted by contrasting it with Heidegger's conception of formal indication. To recall, Heidegger had conceived of linguistic signs as indeterminate/determinate pointers ('indications') to the performance of originary understanding in acts of 'grounding experience'.<sup>157</sup> On this picture, apparently as with Merleau-Ponty, linguistic signs function by gesturing at or towards thoughts rather than fully embodying them, by intimating rather than stating outright. There is a fundamental difference, however, in that Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of 'grounding experience' as a fully and finally determinate presentation of sense. So whereas Heidegger conceives of formal indication as constitutively inadequate gesturing towards original understanding, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of adequacy and accepts that the actual reality of understanding is perspectival, partial, or 'indirect'. True to this commitment, as will

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. section I.4 above.



emerge in the sequel, Merleau-Ponty's conception of language provides a way of understanding the presentational function of language freed of reliance on the idea of a full and original 'presence of sense' that Derrida critically describes as 'the foundational concept of phenomenology as metaphysics' (Derrida 1993, 3, 111).

### 3. The differential structure of indirect sense

Merleau-Ponty's reliance on the idea of 'indirect' sense coincided with important developments to his views on language due to his adoption of Saussurean ideas from 1947 onwards.<sup>158</sup> It is therefore to Saussure's conception of linguistic signs that one must look to understand Merleau-Ponty's enigmatic claims that 'language expresses as much through what is *between* words as through words themselves, and through what it does not say [as much] as through what it says' (*PdM* 61 f.). Merleau-Ponty's interest in Saussure, as economically stated in his 1953 inaugural lecture 'In Praise of Philosophy', centres on the idea that his conception of linguistic signs suggests 'a theory of historical sense' and hence 'a new philosophy of history' (*Éloge* 56). The problem Merleau-Ponty saw for such a theory is to reconcile the roles of contingency and dialectic necessity in historical development, the conflicting demands exemplified in the 'paradox' that the history of language is 'made of too much chance to admit a logical development', yet 'produces nothing that is not motivated' (*PdM* 32). Saussure's virtue, in Merleau-Ponty's view, was to offer an account of the 'living present' or the 'synchronic sense' of language freed from etymological considerations, while reconciling the influences of reason and chance, or necessity and contingency, in 'a new conception of reason'.<sup>159</sup> Merleau-Ponty interpreted these moves as a turn to 'speech [*la parole*], to experienced language' and as such to be a phenomenological view (*PdM* 36; cf. *SNS* 107).

At this point several exegetic difficulties should be mentioned briefly. For the present purposes controversies about the posthumous editing of the *Course in General Linguistics* can be neglected and, since this was the source available to Merleau-Ponty, Saussure's views taken to be those of the published text.<sup>160</sup> Even so,

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Watson (1983, here 210) for a useful catalogue of Merleau-Ponty's references to Saussure.

<sup>159</sup> *PdM* 37, 34. On the historically plausible claim that Saussure liberated linguistics from etymology see Culler 1986, 65-85.

<sup>160</sup> The published text of the *Cours* was compiled from student notes of three courses held from 1907-1911. For a useful survey of the editorial difficulties see chapter 3 of Harris 2001. Bouquet (2004) has argued that linguistics of *parole* was more important to Saussure than the published *Cours* suggests – which would potentially narrow the gap between Saussure and Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of him.

there are notorious difficulties in reconciling Merleau-Ponty's presentation of Saussure with the Saussure of that text.<sup>161</sup> Foremost among these, and potentially bearing on the compatibility of the two views, are Merleau-Ponty's references to Saussure's key distinction between *parole* and *langue*. For example in his 1951 lecture 'On the Phenomenology of Language' Merleau-Ponty suggests that Saussure distinguishes 'synchronic linguistics' of *parole* from 'diachronic linguistics' of *langue* (S 107; cf. also PdM 33). As it stands, this seems straightforwardly mistaken, since Saussure's own distinction was between *parole*, as 'the execution' of speech by individuals, and *langue* as the conventional, social, and above all *synchronic* system of language (*langage*).<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, it might seem that, due to his own emphasis on acts of speech (*parole*), Merleau-Ponty is oblivious to the fact that Saussure (1972 36-37) thought *langue* the proper object of linguistic theory, with *parole* being systematically derivative. Yet despite the impression given by such passages, it would be an oversimplification to think that Merleau-Ponty simply fails to understand (what is after all) a fairly basic distinction of Saussure's.<sup>163</sup> The discrepancies are, I suggest, primarily terminological, and arise because rather than straightforwardly adopting Saussure's standpoint, Merleau-Ponty is *incorporating* certain of Saussure's views into his own position. Moreover, given Merleau-Ponty's focus on 'parole', this incorporation naturally creates the impression that Saussure's views are being misrepresented. In this light, though it is surprising that Merleau-Ponty saw no need to clarify such terminological shifts, it is in fact of secondary importance whether he is being true to Saussure. Nonetheless, terminological changes aside, Merleau-Ponty's view of *parole* as the living present of language does respect key Saussurean motifs, and his talk of a 'return to living spoken language' is clearly justified given Saussure's emphasis on synchronic meaning and the primacy of spoken language.<sup>164</sup> This fidelity, for what it is worth, should emerge more clearly in the sequel.

<sup>161</sup> As Dastur (2001, 63) delicately puts it, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure 'peut sembler peu rigoureuse'; Schmidt (1985, 105) describes it as 'so idiosyncratic that it makes his notoriously loose readings of Husserl look like models of hermeneutic chastity'. For helpful commentary on Merleau-Ponty's relation to Saussure, cf. Lagueux (1965) and Schmidt (1985, 105 ff.).

<sup>162</sup> Saussure 1972, 25, 124. Madison (1981, 322n) ponders whether Merleau-Ponty is confusing Saussure with Pos and Wartburg. But, as Schmidt (1985, 195 f.) reasonably points out, it 'is difficult to believe that Merleau-Ponty would be this confused in the early 1950s after having taught several courses on Saussure.'

<sup>163</sup> In his 1949-50 course, for example, Merleau-Ponty more accurately distinguishes 'parole' as 'what one says' from 'la langue' as 'a system of possibilities' (CAL 84).

<sup>164</sup> CAL 82. For Saussure (1972, 45, cf. 44 ff.) it is the 'spoken word' that 'alone' constitutes the object of linguistics.

So what, according to Merleau-Ponty, constitutes the ‘synchronic sense’ of living speech? The view he develops centres on a distinction between the ‘categories’ of ‘official grammar’ and an underlying ‘expressive system’. And although, in Merleau-Ponty’s use, ‘grammatical’ rules attribute ‘meanings’ (*significations*) to signs, he sees them as lacking explanatory importance (*PdM* 40). This is partly because he takes post-Saussurean linguistics to have established that ‘grammatical categories’ are merely approximative, a ‘retrospective and inessential expression of our proper power to speak’ (*PdM* 39, 38). But the underlying thought is that grammatical – i.e. on Merleau-Ponty’s view, both semantic and syntactic – categories are not autonomous, but to be explained in terms of something more basic: ‘Before language bears its meanings’, he explains, its ‘internal arrangement’ must ‘secrete [...] a certain original sense from which meanings are taken’ (*PdM* 44). Consequently Merleau-Ponty’s discussion focuses exclusively on the functioning of this ‘expressive system’, just as his views on perception focus on the preobjective.

It is in characterizing this ‘expressive system’ that Merleau-Ponty relies on Saussurean ideas. To begin with he identifies phonemes and morphemes as the elements of which words are comprised.<sup>165</sup> The internal organization and interaction of these – as I shall call them – *sublexical elements* are to account for the ‘effective function of speech’ (*PdM* 44), which Merleau-Ponty describes as a holistic process using two Saussurean notions. First, he emphasizes above all the importance of differences: ‘each element of the “verbal chain” [...] only signifies its difference with regard to the others’; ‘The most exact characteristic of a word is to be “what the others are not”’ (*S* 110; *CAL* 83). Indeed Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to suggest that ‘in language there are only differences in meaning [*signification*]’.<sup>166</sup> Second, Merleau-Ponty adopts Saussure’s idea of value, describing language as a ‘collection of linguistic gestures [...], each of which is defined less by a meaning than by a use value’; similarly, all morphemes are ““linguistic tools” which have less a meaning than a *use value*’ (*S* 109; *PdM* 41).

Although Merleau-Ponty never discusses this in detail, it is worth reviewing more precisely the role these notions play in Saussure’s conception of linguistic signs. Saussure (1972, 99) defines a sign as a whole formed by the pairing of ‘signifier’ and

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. *PdM* 41, 47 as well as the examples of 41 ff. Particularly Saussurean is Merleau-Ponty’s claim that phonemes are the ‘true foundations of speech’ (*PdM* 47).

<sup>166</sup> *S* 110. This might seem to echo Saussure’s (1972, 166) own view, but see below.

‘signified’. This is not to be mistaken for a pairing of sign and referent, or any similar modelling of linguistic signs – as what Saussure calls ‘nomenclature’ – on the operation of naming independently individuated objects or ideas. Indeed, his very point in introducing this terminology was to avoid confusion with views that picture linguistic signs as the pairing of antecedently individuated – conceptual and acoustic – elements. The intended relationship was far more intimate, with signifier and signified comprising two aspects, ‘two faces’, of the linguistic sign as a ‘psychic entity’ (Saussure 1972, 99). Saussure offers several ingenious illustrations of this intimacy: e.g. language is to ‘serve as the intermediary between thought and sound’; it resembles a sheet of paper, the two sides of which are thought and sound; linguistic signs are like chemical compounds, such as H<sub>2</sub>O, which are formed from structured elements but acquire new properties in combination (Saussure 1972, 156, 157, 145). Perhaps the most challenging feature of this picture is that the two aspects are supposed to individuate one another, without a basis of primitive or ‘atomic’ units. Thought and sounds, as Saussure (1972, 155, 157) puts it, are simply ‘amorphous and indistinct’ masses, such that each acquires discrete form only through their ‘combination’ in linguistic signs. It is ‘their union’ that ‘leads necessarily to the reciprocal delimitations of units’ (Saussure 1972, 156), so that signs are, so to speak, the intersections to which the articulation of both sound and thought are due.

It is in describing the signifier-signified relationship that Saussure deploys his technical notions of difference and value. With regard to the structure *within* each of the sign’s conceptual and material (phonetic, morphemic) aspects he speaks of ‘differences’; to discuss relationships *between* two (such) ‘orders’, as he calls them, Saussure instead talks of ‘value’. The characteristic feature, on this view, of something with value is therefore to stand in two kinds of relationship: to things ‘similar’, of the same kind (‘order’), with which it can be ‘compared’; and to things ‘dissimilar’, or differing in kind, with which it can be ‘exchanged’. Thus in the paradigmatic case of money a £10 note can be exchanged either for other notes or coins (similar) or for goods (dissimilar) to the same value. Analogously, Saussure suggests, a word can be ‘compared’ with other words (similar) or exchanged for an ‘idea’ (dissimilar).<sup>167</sup> To grasp the point of distinguishing difference and value, it is

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<sup>167</sup> Saussure 1972, 159 f. – A misleading feature, however, of the analogy with money is the latter’s quantitative character, suggesting a uniform principle of comparison – along the lines of more/less – which is hardly germane to language.

helpful to consider another important, though often neglected, distinction made by Saussure. This immediately follows a passage prone to misuse in which Saussure (1972, 166) states ‘in language [*langue*] there are only differences’. Crucially, however, he is talking about ‘all that precedes’, about signifier and signified respectively, so as to distinguish these from the sign as whole. Nonetheless, with ‘the sign in its totality’, as a signifier-signified pairing, ‘one finds oneself in the presence of a thing [that is] positive in its order’, and in relation to this, Saussure states, ‘one cannot speak of difference’. Signs, he explains, are characterized not by ‘difference’, but ‘distinctness’ and ‘opposition’.<sup>168</sup> The key phrase here is ‘in its order’: as a ‘positive’, Saussure is claiming, the sign is something that can be considered discrete, delimited, individuated without reference to something different in kind. In this it differs structurally from the aspects of signifier and signified, which, Saussure has argued, are not composed of antecedently articulated units.

At first blush this might look like mere terminological posturing. It might, for example, be objected that where there are differences there is identity, or discrete units. I think this rather ‘intuitive’ objection is clearly wrong, as is shown by looking at a map of any coastline: here we find a form which undeniably has structure, shape, yet with no natural ‘units’ of which it is comprised. In Saussure’s terms the coastline’s features are ‘different’ but not ‘distinct’.<sup>169</sup> Although both terms imply contrast, they denote dissimilar modes of structural contrast: distinctness is a relation between individuated units, whereas difference can lie on a continuum. Thus whereas coins are distinct, the prodigious range of sounds the human vocal system is capable of producing or an autumnal forest’s rich spectacle of colours are examples of differential structure.

Alternatively, it might be suggested that the prior units of which linguistic signs are composed are morphemes and sememes, i.e. the minimal syntactic features that make a semantic difference and (putatively) basic semantic elements. But this is precisely the kind of suggestion against which Saussure’s analysis is directed. For neither are *signs* in his sense. Rather, these are in effect semi-determinate structures, representing (orthogonal) cross-sections through the system of signs, such that in

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<sup>168</sup> Saussure 1972, 167; cf. 26, where ‘a language [*langue*]’ is characterized as ‘a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas’.

<sup>169</sup> The point is not merely that we don’t know which features to make the basis of distinct units. It is rather that there are no such features. For coastlines are fractals, meaning that ‘the’ exact length (also shape) is a function of the scale at which it is represented (cf. Gleick 1987, 94-96).

focusing on one dimension (e.g. syntactic), the other (semantic) loses all definition.<sup>170</sup> In addition, as Saussure (1972, 157) puts it, one must start with the ‘interdependent whole’ in order to ‘obtain by analysis the elements that it contains’. His point is not merely epistemological or methodological, but rather that elements such as morphemes or phonemes would not exist but for the role they play in a system of constituted signs. Indeed this is precisely what Saussure means in describing language as having no ‘simples’, as being ‘an algebra possessing only complex terms’ or a ‘form’ rather than a ‘substance’ (Saussure 1972, 168 f., cf. 157).

The purpose of Saussure’s terminology is thus to characterize precisely qualitative structural differences between (what he calls) signs and their constituent aspects, i.e. signifiers and signifieds. The result is a hierarchy of structural levels identified by the notions of difference, value, and distinctness respectively. At the lowest level are two ‘orders’, referred to by Saussure as those of ‘acoustic images’ and ‘ideas’, characterized by inhomogeneity, variation, or ‘difference’; but not by individuated units. Difference is discernible, but not in systematic arrangement. At the next level are structures, such as Saussure’s signifier and signified, characterized by ‘value’. Value concerns the relationship between two structural axes. Since, by definition, it is a principle of equivalence that regulates the exchangeability or comparison of all relevant structures, value is necessarily holistic. Morphemes and sememes, though not fully-fledged signs in Saussure’s sense, are particularly illustrative examples of structures with value. Simultaneous semantic and syntactic focus comes only at the level of what Saussure calls ‘signs’. Signs are discrete units, indivisible as such, which stand in relations of ‘distinctness’ to one another and bear ‘characteristic properties’ (*caractères*; Saussure 1972, 168). Saussure’s scheme of concepts can thus be summarized in the table below.

One final point requires emphasis: Although these features are structural, serving to identify particular aspects and relationships of the organization embodied by a system of signs, Saussure does not consider them independent. Rather, as he puts it, value is something ‘emanating from the system’, ‘[i]t is difference that makes the character [of signs], as it makes [their] value and unity’ (Saussure 1972, 162, 168). It

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<sup>170</sup> By way of analogy, the behaviour of a sign might be likened to that of a photon in Young’s slits experiments. With photons Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle ( $\Delta x \Delta p \approx \hbar$ ) tells us that the precision with which a photon’s position is ascertained is inversely proportional to the precision with which its momentum can be known. In an analogous way, the more precisely a syntactic element (e.g. morpheme) is focused on, the less determinate are its semantic properties – and vice versa.

is for this reason that Saussure can be, and often is, read as providing a reductive account of the functioning of signs in terms of difference.

Structural characteristic	Examples	Distinct units ('positives')?	Holistic?
difference	acoustic images ideas	no	no
value	signifier, signified morphemes	no	yes
distinctness	signs words	yes	yes

Against this background, and notwithstanding any laxness in some of Merleau-Ponty's references to Saussure, it is not difficult to discern both convergence and complementarity in their views. Clearly, in addition to their (as Merleau-Ponty supposed) shared interest in the 'living present' of language, both share the view that thought is realized in language. There is also an important parallel between Saussure's rejection of antecedent simples, the view that language is a 'form' not a 'substance', and Merleau-Ponty's view that expressed thoughts are a 'determinate void' (*S* 112). In this respect both seek to account for the functioning of language without recourse to language-independent entities, the presence of which might originate linguistic meaning. But most striking is the structural parallel between Saussure's positive and differential levels and Merleau-Ponty's interest in finding a foundation for objective or conceptual awareness.<sup>171</sup> This parallel allows Merleau-Ponty to see Saussure as providing an approach to language corresponding to his own treatment of perception, linked by the claim that differentiation is a process underlying distinct units: just as gestalts are preobjective structurations in the realm of perception, so too is linguistic differentiation preobjective and preconceptual. Conversely, Merleau-Ponty's gestalt-psychological approach to the formation of categories can be seen as bolstering a weak point in Saussure's approach. For Saussure relies on the thought that both the phonetic and conceptual domains are fundamentally differential. Yet whereas it is reasonably clear how this applies to the linear 'chain' of phonetic 'acoustic images', Saussure does not explain how the

<sup>171</sup> Corresponding to his earlier distinction between 'conceptual meaning' and 'existential meaning' (*PdP* 212; cf. section 1 above).

conceptual domain, or as he also calls it the conceptual ‘chain’, is to be thought of as a process of differentiation (Saussure 1972, 146). It is this gap that Merleau-Ponty’s view of Gestalt formation – the ‘differentiation of excitations which appears to be the essential function of the nervous system’ (*PdP* 88) – can at least claim to be filling.

Given these parallels Merleau-Ponty was able to integrate Saussure’s diacritical conception of signs quite smoothly within the framework of his earlier views. Thus he continues to treat language as gestural, links Saussurean differentiation with his earlier metaphors of the melody or style of articulation, and re-rehearses his argument that language is underlain by an original language of expressive contrasts – except that whereas these were formerly ‘emotional’, they now comprise a system of ‘coherent motivations’.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, as in *PdP* our grasp of language is still to be bodily, gestural, preintellectual, preobjective and nonconceptual. It belongs to the ‘perceptive order’, is ‘quasi-sensory’, is something we ‘sense [*sentir*]’.<sup>173</sup> But his characterization of this basic linguistic sensitivity now takes on a Saussurean flavour: ‘speaking is not having a certain number of signs at one’s disposal, but possessing the language as a principle of distinction’ (*PdM* 46).

At the same time, the appropriation of Saussure’s ideas brings significant changes that address the two difficulties with *PdP*’s position identified in the first section of the chapter. The first is signalled by the fact that Saussure’s conception of signs is not straightforwardly, if at all, amenable to somatocentric interpretation. Whereas in *PdP* Merleau-Ponty had construed the tacit underpinnings of language simply as a ‘tacit cogito’, or a ‘motoric presence’, this ‘silence’ now encompasses both a somatic and an immanent linguistic dimension, or ‘horizon’. So now he claims that phenomenology of language has an ‘ontological bearing’, and somewhat awkwardly concludes that language itself is ‘something like a being’.<sup>174</sup> Correspondingly, *PdM* draws on *two* sciences, psychology *and* linguistics, to show how one ‘can renounce timeless philosophy without falling into irrationalism’.<sup>175</sup> The appropriation of Saussure’s views thus brings what might be described as Merleau-Ponty’s personal version of the linguistic turn, the recognition that the being of language (as an intersubjective, sedimented acquisition) cannot be straightforwardly

<sup>172</sup> Cf. *PdM* (e.g.) 41, 161; 43, 46; and 35 f.

<sup>173</sup> *PdM* 41n (cf. 53n, 57), 42n, 64. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the basic operation of language as nonconceptual (52, 56 f.), preobjective (42n), and links the two via the notion of style (63n).

<sup>174</sup> *S* 108, (‘quelque chose comme un être’) 54.

<sup>175</sup> *PdM* 33; 26-30 deal with psychology, 30-54 with Saussurean linguistics.



assimilated to the behaviour of a single embodied cogito but requires a 'new conception of the being of language' (*S* 110).

Most importantly, second, the diacritical conception of signs provides a much more satisfactory answer to the question of what it is for signs to be the 'vehicle' of sense. In Saussurean terms the functioning of the 'expressive system' is explained as the interaction of phonetic-morphemic and conceptual differentiation, and it is to this that signifier-signified pairings, or linguistic 'categories' are to be due. This provides Merleau-Ponty with an articulate account of the constitution of conceptual meaning or categories in terms of 'a more original differentiation activity [...] an inexhaustible power to differentiate one linguistic gesture from another' (*PdM* 47). Language, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, becomes 'a profusion of gestures, all occupied with differentiating themselves from each other and intersecting. [...] this sublinguistic life, the entire industry of which is to differentiate and systematize signs' (*PdM* 161). So Saussure provides Merleau-Ponty with a way of detailing the specifically linguistic structurations that underlie and shape the conceptual meaning of linguistic expressions. This means that Merleau-Ponty can draw on an articulate and sober (indeed scientifically respectable) conception of the prepredicative workings of language and need no longer rely on misleading claims about emotionality or vague metaphors of singing the world.

The key to understanding how this leads to a 'historical theory of sense', and how contingency and necessity are to be reconciled in a 'new conception of reason', is found in the following claim of Merleau-Ponty's: 'chance is the basis of all the restructurations of language; in this sense one can say that language is the domain of the *relatively motivated*: nothing rational is found there which does not derive from taking up and elaborating some piece of chance by means of systematic expression by the community of speaking subjects' (*CAL* 85). The term 'relatively motivated' again stems from Saussure, who had used it to mark a limitation of his thesis of the 'arbitrariness' of the linguistic sign, i.e. the thesis that there is no 'natural link' between signifier and signified.<sup>176</sup> Notwithstanding this 'fundamental principle of the arbitrariness of the sign', he distinguished features of signs that are 'relatively motivated' from those that are absolutely, or 'radically arbitrary', i.e. 'unmotivated'

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<sup>176</sup> Saussure 1972, 100 f. – Note, incidentally, that Saussure's view of the arbitrariness of signs does not depend, as Benevise (1939, 24) supposed, on the tacit assumption of referents as a 'third term'. Saussure's view is rather that arbitrariness attends the pairing of sounds with differentiated thought, not signs with referents.

(Saussure 1972, 180 f.). As an example Saussure explains that in French whereas the use of the term ‘dix’ to mean ‘10’ or ‘neuf’ to mean ‘9’ is unmotivated, use of ‘dix-neuf’ to mean ‘19’ is relatively motivated and correspondingly less arbitrary. Thus relatively-motivated features are what might be called intelligible features of signs, syntactic traits with conceptual implications, or as Saussure puts it they imply a ‘syntagmatic relation’ and an ‘associative relation’. In doing this, they effect a ‘limitation of the arbitrary’ and are ‘nothing other than the mechanism in virtue of which any term whatever lends itself to the expression of an idea’ (Saussure 1972, 182). This – for Saussure clearly essential – aspect of the functioning of language serves to highlight that his thesis of the ultimate, absolute arbitrariness of the sign does not commit him to the claim that either the *distinctions* marked by linguistic signs or relatively-motivated semiotic features themselves are arbitrary. Indeed, as Saussure (1972, 167) himself argues, on pain of becoming lost or confused ‘every difference’ of ideas ‘perceived by the mind seeks to express itself by distinct signifiers’. So Merleau-Ponty’s point is that relatively motivated features testify to the meeting of contingency and rational order in acts of speech. For on the one hand language deploys contingent (phonetic) material to do its intentional work;<sup>177</sup> yet, on the other hand, traces of such intentional use become inscribed (‘sedimented’) in the sublexical structure of linguistic signs. ‘What Saussure saw’, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, ‘is precisely this meshing of chance and order, this taking-up of the rational, [and] of chance’ (CAL 86). This interweaving of contingency and reason, though already implicit in Saussure’s pairing of phonetic signifier and conceptual signified, is epitomized by Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *parole*. For it is acts of speech, understood to be both contingently conditioned and intentional, that mediate between chance and logic, yielding a ‘constituted’ expressive system shot through with relatively motivated features. Acts of speech are, so to speak, the stitches that weave the fabric of historical and intersubjective sense.<sup>178</sup>

Two clarifications are required. The first concerns the rational status of relative motivations. To take Saussure’s example, it does not seem to be completely

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<sup>177</sup> On Saussure’s view contingency plays a basic role in two ways. In addition to his thesis of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, he argues that semantic shifts often result from (contingent) phonetic shifts which over time result in modified subjective parsings of word meaning (Saussure 1972, 211 ff.).

<sup>178</sup> Note also that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *parole* as a productive intentional act, while differing from Saussure’s minimalist notion of individual performance, is arguably akin to the latter’s treatment of analogy (Saussure 1972, 226 ff.).

contingent that ‘dix-neuf’ means 19 in French; this compound label, we might say, makes sense; but equally there is no compelling *reason* for adopting this label, rather (say) than a simple one such as ‘seize’ for 16. It is precisely this intermediacy between causes and reason that Merleau-Ponty expresses with the term ‘motivation’: ‘One phenomenon triggers another, not by an objective efficacy, like that which links the events of nature, but through the sense it offers – there is a reason for being that orients the flow of phenomena without being explicitly posited in any of them’.<sup>179</sup> A motive, on this view, is inchoately rational in a dual sense. First, it serves as a basis for reasons that it cannot be considered to embody antecedently. This important asymmetry, which I will call *nonretrojectability*, means that such reasons as motives lead us to find cannot be projected back into the motivating structure itself. This is more plausible when one bears in mind, second, Merleau-Ponty’s view that ‘*lived logic*’ does not ‘possess the full determination of its objects’ (*PdP* 61): nonretrojectability is not simply a stipulation, but is due to the fact that motives’ are – as I shall say – *semideterminate* and could in principle always motivate different reasons. So on this view a motive, or a motivated feature, is something with sense that enters into intentional activity, and shapes or ‘orients’ this without fully predetermining it. It is in this technical sense, I suggest, that Merleau-Ponty adopts Saussure’s talk of the relatively motivated. His claim is that, despite their ultimately contingent phonetic basis, the sublexical structure of words conveys *something* about the way their referents are to be thought of, that relative to other features of the lexical system morphemes can signal aspects of similarity and difference. For example, in English the four words ‘telephone’, ‘microphone’, ‘telescope’, and ‘microscope’ are clearly cognate. And whereas the various objects to which each term refers might have acquired a different label in the language, these terms could not be interchanged without failing to make sense in a way particularly appropriate to their referents. It is this kind of loose connection between the structure of words and what they can be used to mean that makes language, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, ‘the domain of the relatively motivated’. The shape of individual expressions constrains, though it does not fully determine, what they can be used to say. So while morphemic features might suggest reasons for preferring one word over others, their relative character

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<sup>179</sup> *PdP* 61. This characterization of motives corresponds to the phenomenological concept of foundation described at *PdP* 451. For a clear and detailed discussion of the motivations and their relationship to causes and reasons see Wrathall 2005.

implies that not all such features are thus interpretable, and their motivational character means that such reasons as we find cannot be projected back into language – as its inherent underlying rationality or some such.

Second: it might look as though Merleau-Ponty has overstated the case in describing language straightforwardly as the domain of relative motivations. Isn't Saussure's point to distinguish some signs from others? Doesn't he imply that relatively motivated features are found only in 'compound' words formed of several morphemes? Well, compound terms, such as 'dix-neuf', no doubt provide clear paradigms of the principle of relative motivation. Nevertheless, Saussure's own claim extends further. Relative motivation, he says, is the 'mechanism in virtue of which *any term whatever* lends itself to the expression of an idea' (Saussure 1972, 182; italics added). Two thoughts can help in understanding the broad scope of this thesis. The first is that words belong to an articulate system, and that as such each word means what it does only in relation to others, and ultimately to all others. In Saussure's terms this is reflected in the notion of value, with its concomitant holism, and the distinctness of linguistic signs from one another. So even where there is no manifest structure to words, their formation is nonetheless a distinct node within the system of phonetic and conceptual differences. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the 'expressive power of a sign depends on its being part of a system and coexisting with other signs'; accordingly, language is 'a system of signs which only have sense relative to one another and of which each is recognized according to a certain use value that comes to it in the whole of the language' (*PdM* 52; *Éloge* 56 f.). The second thought is the Austinian idea that the mere existence of an established word should serve as *prima facie* evidence for its having a distinct function.<sup>180</sup> This idea is based on the evolutionary heuristic that words are more likely to establish themselves in language, rather than disappearing from circulation, if they are found to have a specific use. What both these thoughts assume is that there is some kind of reason for the existence of a particular word, as distinct from all others. Or rather, since this assumption is presumably defeasible – perhaps there are genuine synonyms and/or redundancy in use – and because any claim to identify 'the' *reason* for any such differences is bound to look suspect, the intelligibility of words' distinctness is presumably somewhat weaker. This weaker link, I am suggesting, can be understood,

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<sup>180</sup> Austin uses this argument, about the 'natural economy of language', to justify his methodological concentration on Ordinary Language (Austin 1979, 190, 182).

with Merleau-Ponty, by saying that the existence of a particular word is motivated relative to all others, i.e. is relatively motivated.

There is one subtle, but significant difference between Merleau-Ponty's and Saussure's view of signs. Saussure, despite describing them as 'emanating' from the underlying patterns of phonetic and conceptual differentiation, allows that signs as distinct, 'positive' linguistic units do result. Merleau-Ponty, however, adopts a more reductive attitude. He takes Saussurean linguistics to show that 'grammatical categories' are only ever approximate and, so to speak, epiphenomenal, so that they play no proper role in accounting for the functioning of language.<sup>181</sup> Although perhaps making explicit Saussure's tendency in talking of 'emanation', Merleau-Ponty's claim goes further in suggesting that the macrosemantics of conceptual relations can be accounted for reductively by the microsemantics of the prepredicative expressive system.

A reductive approach of this kind would, however, exacerbate a problem inherited from Saussure. For perhaps the gravest deficiency of his conception of signs is that reference plays no role in it, which makes it susceptible to the charge of linguistic idealism, of viewing language as an abstract medium disconnected from the world.<sup>182</sup> To some degree Merleau-Ponty's overall picture of language suggests a corrective to this tendency. After all, his view of language as embodied expressive behaviour rules out many of the ontological assumptions Saussure encourages: e.g. viewing *langue* as a platonistic abstract object or a closed system of semiotic relations, or as somehow licensing the structuralist tradition's subject-free picture of linguistic phenomena.<sup>183</sup> But the ontological embeddedness of Merleau-Ponty's overall picture is not carried over into his conception of how signs function. For he not only fails to take any account of the use of signs to refer to objects, but effectively eliminates that aspect of Saussure's picture – signs as distinct units – to which an account of language's referential function might be annexed.

Three lines of argument can be found in Merleau-Ponty for accepting his reductionist move. The first is that our use of language does not seem to involve specific awareness of the conceptual, or 'categorical', properties of linguistic

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. S 49 and page 102 above.

<sup>182</sup> This charge is developed, for example, by Falck 1986 and Dillon 1997, 181-186.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty's 1959 essay on structuralist anthropology, in which he insists on the need for 'a sort of lived equivalent' to ground formal theoretical structures (S 149, cf. also 155).

expressions.<sup>184</sup> Although plausible as a phenomenological observation, this hardly supports Merleau-Ponty's reductive claim, since in speaking we are no more focally aware of the values of sublexical elements than we are of grammatical categories. The second argument is that 'it is essential to language that the logic of its construction is never one of those that can be put in concepts'. Instead, Merleau-Ponty continues, language is an expressive activity driven by the 'blurred logic of a system of expression which bears the traces of another past and the germs of another future' (*PdP* 52 f.). This argument, that the expressive power of language depends on sublexical factors which are irreducible to conceptual relations, is stronger. Nonetheless it too is inconclusive, for the fact that linguistic functioning is not reducible to conceptual relations does not entail that conceptual relations are not also important, i.e. that linguistic function can be explained reductively in terms of nonconceptual relations, as Merleau-Ponty seems to think. The third is that Merleau-Ponty seems to think of himself as more consistently assimilating the insights of Saussurean linguistics, hinting that the latter remains too close to 'positivism' (*PdM* 55). Perhaps his thought is that, having dispensed with primitive or atomic entities at the start of his account, Saussure lapses into a corresponding commitment to (final) determinacy by reintroducing the notion of distinct signs. However, unless it is shown that emergent distinctness relies on a problematic notion of full presence, it is difficult to see what the problem might be, since the rejection of presupposed determinacy in no way implies that there should be anything problematic about emanating determinacy. Alternatively, perhaps Merleau-Ponty's thought is that if distinct linguistic units simply 'emanate' from underlying differential processes, they have no proper function and are hence explanatorily vacuous. This is, of course, quite true, but begs the present question about the legitimacy of a reduction in simply assuming that distinct units have no functional importance.

The requisite conclusion is that Merleau-Ponty fails to provide convincing reasons for his apparent view that conceptual meaning can be accounted for reductively in terms of underlying differential processes. If the referential use of signs is to be incorporated in an overall picture of how language functions, as it no doubt should be, linguistic signs should in this respect be understood as closer to Saussure's own model. Thus one can accept that sublexical differentiation has a role in

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. *PdM* 40. Merleau-Ponty similarly praises Saussure for having freed considerations of meaning from etymology on the grounds that speakers are usually unaware of such factors (*PdM* 33).

explaining the functioning of language, yet allow that talk of determinate conceptual meanings (or 'positives') is not otiose. This leaves open the possibility that *something like* Saussurean positives comprise a higher level of linguistic organization, characterized by irreducible level-specific (emergent) features of a kind suggested by Saussure's (1972, 145) analogy with H<sub>2</sub>O. At such a 'positive' level signs might behave more or less as they would if characterized only by determinate conceptual meanings, as they perhaps appear to be in standard use. This suggestion is in fact less difficult to reconcile with Merleau-Ponty's approach than it might seem. For the key requirement is that *something* functions as a distinct sign, which is unproblematic provided that this is not conceived of in terms of a full objective presence. So on Merleau-Ponty's picture we need only replace the talk of something 'positive' with that of a 'determinate void' behaving, to all intents and purposes, as though it were unambiguously determinate.

#### **4. Painting as a model of indirect sense**

A second characteristic feature of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of indirect sense is his reliance on an analogy with painting, motivated by the thought that both this and language are forms of 'creative expression' (S 59). The development of this analogy is clearly intended to correspond to his appropriation of Saussure and so to provide a complementary perspective on processes of linguistic articulation. This section will therefore look at three aspects of this analogy to show both how it illustrates the function of indirect sense and how it lends support to thinking of language as having the structural and rational characteristics suggested by Saussure's conception of language.

(i) *The presentational function of style*: There is of course nothing new in comparing the representational feats of language with those of pictures or images. What is distinctive about Merleau-Ponty's comparison is that it centres on modern painting, which might initially seem surprising, given the common thought that this departs from traditional painting's concern with accurately representing the natural world – a task plausibly shared with language. In keeping with his general notion of expression, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that modern painting can be understood a move away from objective representation to subjective self-expression. In doing so he foregrounds the objection that a subjectivist notion of self-expression cannot account

for acceptance of incompleteness (the *inachevé*) in modern painting.<sup>185</sup> This objection is telling. It is not simply the banal point that it became acceptable for artists to leave gaps on a finished canvas, but testifies that modern painting is no longer *directed towards* the ideal of adequate representation. Somewhat paradoxically therefore, it is precisely because it does not attempt to represent nature adequately that Merleau-Ponty is drawn to modern art. Nonetheless, it is significant that, while breaking with traditional academic techniques such as central or aerial perspective, the work of the early modern painters Merleau-Ponty has in mind – in particular Cézanne and Matisse – is generally figurative or representational, rather than purely abstract, in character. For, as will be seen, this enables him to treat painting as a paradigm of indirect encounters with the world which deploy an ‘allusive logic’ rather than supposedly ‘sufficient signs’ of the visual’ (*PdM* 91, 71).

Merleau-Ponty faces a challenge: if not as adequate representation of the world, and not as subjective self-expression, how is the task of modern painting to be understood? His response is that ‘What the painter puts into the painting is not his immediate self [...], it is his style’ (*S* 65). This appeal to style is finely balanced. On the one hand, style is the hallmark of embodied action and is therefore to be understood as founded in our body as ‘a general power of motoric formulation capable of transpositions that effect the constancy of style’.<sup>186</sup> On the other hand, it is fundamental to Merleau-Ponty’s view that artistic output is the product of intentional, deliberate expressive acts (cf. *PdM* 82-84; *SNS* 23 ff.). This is what allows him, despite emphasizing the intimate link between an individual’s life and art, to distance himself from both a crude expressivism – such that, for example, sad painters automatically paint sad pictures – and the inadequacies of psychoanalytic theories of art.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, although he does not use these terms, and though an artist will surely have both, Merleau-Ponty clearly intends to distinguish *artistic style*, as a feature of works, from *personal style*, as characterizing an embodied agent.

Merleau-Ponty defines (artistic) style as a mode of ‘formulation’ that can be characterized for ‘each painter [as] the system of equivalences that he constitutes for

<sup>185</sup> *PdM* 77. On the preceding, cf. Merleau-Ponty’s summary of the task for a modern theory of expression on *PdM* 79.

<sup>186</sup> *S* 82. For the link with the general system of embodied equivalences – i.e. the ‘schéma corporel’ of *PdP* – see *S* 83 or *PdM* 110.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. *PdM* 105 f. Merleau-Ponty’s Cézanne interpretation discusses this intimate link, arguing that although not straightforwardly explained by facts about the painter’s life his painterly expression, ‘*this work to be done demanded this life*’ (*SNS* 26).



this work of manifestation'; 'what makes "a Vermeer" for us, or that that it speaks Vermeer's language, is [...] that it observes the particular system of equivalences'.<sup>188</sup> Although this allows style to be highly individual, in several ways it is an impersonal feature. For example, an artist is not assumed to have privileged knowledge of it: 'it is a mode of formulation that is just as recognizable for others, as little visible for him as his silhouette or his everyday gestures' (*PdM* 82). Indeed, while immersed in the task of creative production the artist may not be conscious of style as such – it may develop, *so to speak*, without him knowing (*à son insu*; *S* 67). Moreover, there is no reason to think of it one-sidedly as manifestation of an artist's self: 'When style is at work the painter knows nothing of the antithesis of the human and the world'; 'the painter himself [cannot] ever say [...] what is due to him and what is due to things' (*PdM* 83, 95). Instead style characterizes an artist's representational technique *as such*, a particular way of depicting the world. Vermeer, for example, has artistic significance not as an 'empirical figure', but as the inaugurator of 'an essence, a structure, a Vermeer sense' (*PdM* 100). In this perspective style is akin to scientific or technological discoveries – intellectual acquisitions that no one thinks of as inextricably linked with their creator. As a characteristic way of doing something, a technique, style is clearly impersonal or 'objective', so that there is no reason to suppose that the inventor of a technique, an artist perhaps, is in a privileged position to understand the significance of his or her own style.

What Merleau-Ponty means by a 'mode of formulation' and a 'system of equivalences' is illustrated by an anecdote he borrows from André Malraux of a hotelier in Cassis who was (apparently) intrigued to see Renoir working on a painting of riverside washer women while standing before the sea. Merleau-Ponty explains that Renoir's interest in painting the blue of the sea was to study a 'fragment of the world' so as to grasp 'a general manner of speaking'. His concern was to 'interpret the liquid substance, to manifest it, to compose with this itself' and so to master what is 'typical of the manifestations of water' (*PdM* 87 f., cf. 104). Renoir was, one might say, sampling an aspect of the visual world, the style of water's visual effects, so as to add to his compositional repertoire as a painter. Or, more prosaically, he was practising a certain way of painting water.

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<sup>188</sup> *PdM* 86, 99. The terms 'mise en forme' and 'formulation' are found at *PdM* 84 f., 86 and *PdM* 82 respectively.

The point Merleau-Ponty makes with this anecdote can be elucidated more fully by relating it to Ernst Gombrich's strikingly similar account of the relationship between artistic expression and style. Despite thinking of the history of western art in a progressivist manner, guided by the representational ideal of accurately rendering the appearance of the natural world, Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* argues against the idea of an 'innocent eye' that would allow art simply to copy nature. Whether or not this holds as a psychological thesis – which is how Gombrich presents it – is in fact irrelevant to his central claim, which is that painting relies upon available compositional techniques. Taking landscapes, animals, human bodies and clouds as examples, Gombrich shows how, in practice, learning to paint has always involved mastering the use of pictorial 'schemata' embodying the proportions and physiognomy considered essential to accurate rendition.<sup>189</sup> Such schemata, which were collected in compendia for teaching purposes, function as a 'visual vocabulary' (Gombrich 1960, 143) from which representational paintings could be built up. Now, of course, the use of schemata in painting does not rule out personal and specific variations. Indeed, once mastered, they have an enabling function, underdetermining final products and obviously permitting the personal or context-dependent variations of which art history is replete. Nor is Gombrich's claim simply empirical or historical; rather his point is that the representation of objects in painting are necessarily mediated by techniques of rendition. As he says, the 'artist, no less than the writer, needs a vocabulary before he can embark on a "copy" of reality' (Gombrich 1960, 75). It is this fact that allows him to explain the role of history in art, and to make sense of his claims about the need for and nature of progress in naturalistic representation. For such progress depends on the development of representational techniques, or schemata, which Gombrich sees (in a Popperian manner) as evolving in an experimental process of trial and error.

It may be objected that Gombrich's progressivism and emphasis on the telos of naturalistic representation make it precisely the kind of position Merleau-Ponty opposes. This is true. Nevertheless, what I take to be Gombrich's central claims – that expression in painting is to be understood in terms of the use of schemata and that these are the vehicle of style – can be generalized independently of his representationalist orientation, so that their thoughts can be paralleled. For although

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<sup>189</sup> For details, see in particular Gombrich 1960, 55-78, 126-152.

there is no longer a standard ‘vocabulary’ of representational elements, even nonrepresentational or ‘abstract’ painting is usually built up of a visual vocabulary of characteristic formal features such that the works of individual artists – e.g. Klee, Kandinsky, Pollock, Stella, Twombly – usually exhibit a distinctive ‘look’, or style, enabling them to be told apart. To generalize Gombrich’s view, schemata need only be thought of as exemplifying formal patterns rather than formal patterns that stand for objects, i.e. as being *configurational* rather than representational. In this sense it is the composition and variation of formal elements (schemata) in more or less systematic and sophisticated ways that constitute the *characteristic* features, the style, of representational and nonrepresentational works alike. As Gombrich (1960, 309) puts it, it ‘is in the microstructure of movement and shapes that the connoisseur will find the inimitable personal accent of an artist.’ Merleau-Ponty’s Renoir anecdote can be interpreted in this perspective: Rather than, say, sampling the visible essence of water, Renoir is seen to be rehearsing or honing techniques, or configurational schemata, that underpin and so characterize his painting. Moreover, just as Merleau-Ponty intimates, it is regularities or characteristic features of configurational schemata which constitute a painter’s distinctive look, so that these are rightly considered the vehicle of style.

There are two senses in which the analogy with painting exemplifies the idea of an ‘allusive logic’. The first is well highlighted by the example of early modern painting, which provides a paradigm for the way configured form functions in presenting the world. As already hinted, eschewing the idea of ‘sufficient signs’ of the visual – which Merleau-Ponty considers its characteristic feature – does not prevent (say) Cézanne’s or Matisse’s work from being figurative or representational. The crucial feature of such painting is that differences in pictorial articulation correspond to discernible features of visual experience. Yet the importance of these examples is to bring out a functional asymmetry, showing that for features of a painting to be ‘representational’ it suffices that they can be read in a picture-to-world direction. To be sure, painted articulations should succeed – at least roughly – in picking out discernible features of the world. But an asymmetry arises insofar as to meet this requirement the painting need not be recognizable as a direct copy of what

it represents.<sup>190</sup> On reflection, this is obvious: since there is no principled limit to the fine-grainedness of visual experience, to insist on correspondence read from world-to-picture would imply an unworkable criterion. What Merleau-Ponty calls modern art's 'toleration' of the *inachevé* is nothing but the acceptance, or even celebration, of its inevitable fate. So the first sense in which paintings embody an 'allusive logic' is that they can function representationally without aspiring to capture every feature of what they represent, i.e. to the ideal of adequacy. Rather than 'capturing things themselves in its forms', it suffices that a representational painting exemplifies a certain pattern of articulation and invites us to see the world as articulated in the way the painting presents it.<sup>191</sup>

The second sense in which paintings exhibit an 'allusive logic' is in their presentational mechanism. For schemata, Gombrich's 'visual vocabulary', depict characteristic aspects of the world that have been abstracted out for both reapplication and reinterpretation in the context of diverse works. Alongside obvious schemata – such as faces, body forms etc. – this can be thought of as including less objectual methods for rendering space, light (shadow), texture and so on. Although they acquire concrete significance in single works, such schemata function as do they precisely because they are schematic, i.e. neither devoid of, nor fully determinate in representational significance. They are, so to speak, adumbrations rather than embodiments of determinate pictorial meaning and in this sense the 'allusive' means on which the presentational feats of paintings rely.

(ii) *Painting as a model of deliberative activity*: An important feature of Merleau-Ponty's comparison is the suggestion that the indirect sense borne by linguistic articulations resembles the style of paintings in its mode of intelligibility. This follows partly from the impersonality of style. For if artistic style is conceived as an work predicate, characterized by a system of equivalences, then Merleau-Ponty is right to suggest that people other than the artist will be able to assess it, just as others are competent to assess the uses to which a scientific technique can be put. Indeed, to some extent the sense embodied by individual paintings is already a function of the

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. *PdM* 91 f. By 'direct copy' I mean here, roughly, like a photo rather than a caricature: e.g. there is correspondence without omission, geometric distortion, changes in patterns of colour equivalence, a loss of linear-perspectival integrity etc.

<sup>191</sup> S 55. This presentational function is clearly independent of whether or not the painting has an actual referent. In this sense the presentational sense of pictorial articulations is more intrinsic to pictorial expression than the referential function.

context in which it is considered. For it clearly makes a difference whether one asks what is the significance of doing such-and-such for the artist herself, in her contemporary context, or for subsequent art. Although an artist presumably knows better than anyone else the answer in first sense, in the second sense she is no more privileged than anyone else, while in the third sense many others will be in a better position. However, this will be more true still of general features such as stylistic innovations. For such ‘acquisitions’, as Merleau-Ponty terms them, naturally undergo a context shift, or *recontextualization*, from the individual to the public and historical perspective, such that once a new painting technique is invented its originator has no more privilege in determining its uses or full significance – in the second and third senses – than the inventor of a scientific theory.

Further important implications of Merleau-Ponty’s analogy can be brought out by considering a second example highlighting the embodied character of painting activity. Thus to explain the way indirect sense is ‘between words’ Merleau-Ponty discusses a slow motion film of Matisse at work which shows that rather than moving with mechanical or surgical precision, Matisse’s hand deftly rehearsed different possibilities, appearing to ‘meditate’, before applying each single brushstroke (*PdM* 62). Having characteristically warned against over-rationalizing this process, Merleau-Ponty comments: ‘it is true that the hand hesitated, that it meditated; it is therefore true that there was choice, that the chosen trait was chosen so as to satisfy ten conditions [...] that were unformulated, inexpressible for anyone but Matisse, since they were defined and imposed only by the intention to make *that painting which did not yet exist*’ (*PdM* 64). The immediate point, then, is that the brushstrokes actually made are situated within and stand out against this field of alternative possibilities, even though the relevant alternatives did not exist prior to the act of creative expression. However, the example also highlights that painting is an operation that is both *intentional*, i.e. directed towards the work being produced, and involves *deliberate choice*. To talk of ‘deliberate choice’ here does not, of course, mean that Matisse engaged in a process of conscious and explicit *reasoning* to arrive at his choice of brushstroke. Rather there is what might be called ‘motoric deliberation’, a preconceptual weighing up, (literally) going through the motions so as to get the right feel for the stroke required. The reason this is deliberation, rather than palpitation or pot luck, is that the resultant stroke is nonetheless subject to both

considerations of appropriateness and, where needed, correction in the context of the nascent work, and hence to some degree of conscious control.

This suggests that the choice processes governing features of a painting are what I shall call *rationaly ambivalent* in standing between two poles hinted at by the expression ‘motoric deliberation’. On the one hand their determination may tend to be discourse-led, i.e. guided by the intention to embody certain ideas. An extreme example of this is perhaps minimalism, in which certain artistic features arguably acquire their significance from a framework of (theoretical) discourse. On the other hand, the painting process may flow more contingently, as the (dispositional) product of having learned in a certain way – the artist’s ‘natural’ way of painting – or simply so as to achieve a particular visual appearance. In the former case reasons precede and determine pictorial features, in the latter they succeed and seek to interpret them. The point of this rather artificial contrast is not to assert that the two kinds of influence can be cleanly prised apart in artistic practice. Quite the contrary, the point is precisely that reasons and contingent factors are interwoven in the painting process so that such a distinction cannot be clearly made. Hence rational ambivalence: it will generally be unclear whether particular features of any painting are discourse-led or discourse-leading, whether they result from or provide a basis for reasoning.

This clearly bears on the interpretability or intelligibility of a painting. To be sure, every aspect of a painting – in contrast to the causality of photographs – is in some way the product of deliberation. Correspondingly, everything about a painting is potentially intelligible: not only is each brushstroke part of a pictorial whole, say in rendering objects as part of a motif, but stylistic choices too are often integral to realizing a work’s aim.<sup>192</sup> So in attempting (seriously) to interpret the meaning inherent in a painting, the default assumption must be that every feature is deliberate. The painting is treated as a complex of interpretable forms, with the aim being to articulate reasons for particular features’ having been done in the way they are rather than in some other way. Yet at the same time, the assumed interpretability of a painting is inhibited by its rational ambivalence: As a product of motoric deliberation, a hybrid of dispositional and reasoned activity, it is impossible in principle to ascertain a cut-off between causal and rational factors in the painting process. Indeed,

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<sup>192</sup> For example, it is not difficult to find reasons for the deployment of different kinds of brushstrokes in Jean François Millet’s rural scenes, Seurat’s pointillism, or Cézanne’s late paintings of the Bibemus quarry and the Mont Saint-Victoire.

even if one is tempted to think of an artist's testimony as an appropriate criterion for making such a distinction, this will be at best a limited guide. Overall this suggests that although an interpreter of a painting must by default assume that every feature is deliberate, this assumption cannot point towards a system of underlying reasoning. In other words, as a product of motoric deliberation a painting exhibits the nonretrojectability identified above as characteristic of motivations.

Against this background the analogy with painting provides a way of understanding why linguistic articulations should be thought of in terms of motivations, or as inchoately rational, in the manner described in the previous section. The crux of the analogy is the fact that both are the products not of chance, but of deliberate intentional activity, so that there is *prima facie* reason to think of them as being intelligible. There is often a temptation, particularly with regard to language, to assimilate all deliberative activities to highly reflective, maximally explicit cases such as solving mathematical problems. The significance of Merleau-Ponty's painting analogy, in particular his Matisse example, is therefore to provide an alternative paradigm of deliberate intentional activity that better reflects its character as 'incarnate logic' or 'logic within contingency' (S 110). The analogy is also supported by the fact that in linguistic acts, as in painting, the contingent and arbitrary blends seamlessly with the rational. For although the formation of lexis will often be due to explicit reasoning, contingency is involved – as Saussure emphasizes – through both changes in word parsing due to phonetic drift and the ultimate arbitrariness of the phonetic basis of linguistic signs.<sup>193</sup> With these parallels in mind, comparison with the production of a single painting already suggests that linguistic articulations should be thought of as exhibiting the trait of nonretrojectability. However, this conclusion is reinforced by the fact that linguistic articulations, just as stylistic or other techniques, are subject to recontextualization so that, once coined, new terms enter a systematic context broader than might (possibly) have been considered by their inventors.<sup>194</sup>

It is also possible to appreciate how the semideterminacy – the second characteristic of motivations – arises with linguistic expressions. This is linked with the important difference between individual paintings, as concrete artefacts, and an articulate lexical system, as what I shall call a *type artefact*. The lexical system as a

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. footnote 177.

<sup>194</sup> An 'act of thought, having been expressed, from then on has the power to outlive itself' (*PdP* 449). This fact, incidentally, highlights the naivety of Nietzsche's (1980, 260 [I §2]) suggestion that the coining of concepts be thought of as an 'expression of power by the dominant'.

whole, and each of its constituents, are not just one-off products, but – in Merleau-Ponty's terms – the 'sediment' of 'iterated' expressive operations (*PdP* 229, 222). As such individual words are both conditioned and conditioning, both products of and the material for deliberate intentional acts which (as a rule) have been reused or recycled countless times. Such recycling has feedback effects that impregnate linguistic articulations with motivational character: 'having been employed in different contexts [...] the word is gradually charged with a sense that it is not possible to fix absolutely' (*PdP* 445). For on the one hand, our propensity to find words meaningful or appropriate for intentional use is explained by the fact that they have (often) been used previously. In contrast to that of individual paintings, the intelligibility of linguistic articulations, as type artefacts, is an evolved intelligibility: words are tried and tested expressive tools.<sup>195</sup> On the other hand, with such iteration the effects of rational ambivalence and recontextualization on the overall product are compounded, so that there can be no sensible aspiration to uncover 'the' rationality inherent in the sediment of linguistic articulation. By thus both compounding the supposition of intelligibility and frustrating any hope of unique underlying rationality, the (distributed, iterative, evolutive) mode of production brings about the semideterminacy of linguistic articulation as a whole. The need to think of linguistic articulation as an inchoately rational field of motivations thus results from their being both a product of motoric deliberation, which introduces nonretrojectability, and type artefacts, which generates semideterminacy.

The difference between an individual painting, as a concrete artefact, and linguistic articulations, as type artefacts, can be usefully summed up by saying that although each can be thought of as an arrangement of interpretable form, they differ in their respective modes of interpretability. With an individual painting – as a single object of determinate origin – an art historian's interpretation may aim to rediscover its original meaning, even though this aspiration must contend with the rational ambivalence of painting just highlighted. The important point, nevertheless, is that its interpretability is *retrospective*, based on the supposition of antecedent rationality. Interpretation is here recovery. However, with linguistic articulation – a sedimented type artefact of indeterminately many origins – such retrospective interpretation would be pointless given its typological and pervasive motivational character. In this

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<sup>195</sup> This is what licences Austin's talk of 'natural economy of language' and 'the long test of the survival of the fittest' (Austin 1979, 190, 182).



case to talk of interpretable forms instead, means that words are open to constant (re)interpretation in acts of speech, thus exhibiting *in situ* or *situated interpretability*. Interpretation is here application to the given circumstances.

It is perhaps worth highlighting that the interrelated features discussed here – inchoate rationality, motivational character, and situated interpretability – are not imperfections, but fundamental to the way words work. Philosophers have often been tempted to think of words, at least ‘ideally’, as bearing a determinate meaning and as playing a well-defined role in some fully rational system. But against such preconceived ideals it should be emphasized that the evolved intelligibility outlined here and the consequent situated interpretability are a condition for words’ functioning as they do. For they underlie both the aptness of words, the fact that these seem antecedently suited for use in presenting features of the world, and their plasticity, the fact that they can be adapted to new situations and applications.

(iii) *Style as a preconceptual generality*: Finally, the analogy with painting can show what is meant by Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of style as a ‘pre-conceptual generality’ and as ‘that which renders all meaningful signs [*signification*] possible’ (*PdM* 63n, 81). In the case of paintings this suggestion is easy to follow, since it is obvious that any given object, a chair say, could be rendered in indefinitely many different ways, different visual styles, without falling under a different concept. To isolate what the preconceptual features of paintings are it will be helpful to consider Panofsky’s (1993, cf. 51-67) well-known distinction between three aspects of pictorial meaning: the pre-iconographic, which catalogues or inventories the objects depicted; the iconographic, which identifies, where appropriate, the conventional symbolism of those objects; and the iconological, which is concerned with interpreted content. A conspicuous feature of this model is that it applies – albeit intentionally – only to representational, conventional, and highly codified works. But, even accepting this limitation, in concentrating on represented objects and narrative Panofsky’s model effectively assimilates pictorial meaning to conceptual and propositional content. In so doing it fails to accommodate two essential aspects of painting. First, it disregards the fact that pre-iconographic items are built up from formal elements which in themselves could not be assigned any determinate meaning. Yet anything in a picture that is conceptually interpretable must consist of some configuration of forms, it must – as I shall put it – be *configured*. It is this feature, I

suggest, that Merleau-Ponty is drawing attention to in describing style as ‘preconceptual’ and as a precondition for ‘signification’. Second, Panofsky’s model fails to reflect the fact that arrangements of form and colour are continuously variable, i.e. what Goodman calls the ‘syntactic density’ of pictures.<sup>196</sup> This means – as in the chair example above – that any number of compositional or configurational differences could fail to make a difference to the ‘content’ of a painting. However, what matters here is that we nonetheless *see* differences in formal configuration, i.e. in style.<sup>197</sup> This is why the example of paintings is so attractive for Merleau-Ponty. Because we can see differences in (syntactically dense) configuration, and because the conceptual content of paintings must be configured, paintings are a paradigm in which the seeing of stylistic differences is plausibly prior to conceptual awareness.

How is this thought to apply to language? As already mentioned, Merleau-Ponty’s analogy with painting and his notion of style as a ‘system of equivalences’ are intended to converge with the Saussurean conception of signs, as complementary takes on the process of linguistic articulation and indirect sense. Hence in both cases the focus is on certain aspects of structure – configurational schemata in painting, and differential signifiers and signifieds in language – the role of which is to be subconceptual. Less obviously perhaps, style choices can be viewed as taking place in a differential realm in Saussure’s sense insofar as stylistically relevant choices are made on a ‘syntactically dense’ continuum of possibilities. Moreover, in a slightly extenuated, and somewhat intuitive, sense Saussure’s notion of value could also be applied to the use of configurational or stylistic features. For clearly the use of various materials, methods and forms in a given work can be considered in terms of interchangeability and comparison – as expressed in the maxim that in a successful work nothing could be added or taken away without aesthetic compromise.

Nonetheless, there are limits to the analogy with painting, and in this respect considering Panofsky’s model is particularly instructive. For in assimilating pictorial meaning to conceptual and propositional meaning this appears to assimilate paintings to language. Consequently, the features of pictures Panofsky’s model misses – viz. configuredness and denseness – might seem not to apply to language, and so to show up the analogy’s limits. However, as just hinted, in the case of language too the

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<sup>196</sup> A notational scheme that is ‘syntactically dense [...] provides for infinitely many characters so ordered that between each two there is a third’ (Goodman 1976, 136).

<sup>197</sup> For an impressive illustration of this cf. Gombrich’s (1960, 309) juxtaposition of a van Gogh copy of Millet’s *Cornfield* with the original.

formation of linguistic signs from sublexical elements can be considered as a process of subconceptual configuration. But is language syntactically dense? Well, although the phonetic aspect is itself continuously variable, its organization through use in a sign system results in sublexical elements – phonemes or morphemes – characterized by discontinuities. In other words, the resultant configuration of linguistic signs is not syntactically dense, but syntactically discrete – or, to borrow another of Goodman’s terms, ‘finitely differentiated’.<sup>198</sup> This brings out a difficulty not discussed by Merleau-Ponty. For it is precisely the fact that indefinitely small differences count, that there is syntactic density, which makes style such an important feature of paintings. Indeed the infinite variability of every feature makes it practically inevitable that each painter will exhibit an individual style. The same cannot be said regarding language. For as language users we cannot freely vary the form of signifiers; or rather we can to the extent that others are able to neglect such variations and map them onto a familiar and discrete phonological/morphological scheme. Far from being a sociological observation, this identifies a fundamental disanalogy between language and painting: insensitivity to syntactic variations beyond a certain degree is a requirement for the practical and communicative functioning of linguistic signs.<sup>199</sup> As a result style, in Merleau-Ponty’s sense, is a more strongly constrained and presumably less salient phenomenon with language than it is with pictures. Moreover, because it cannot rely on continuous malleability, the development of individual linguistic style will generally turn on factors other than syntactic variations.<sup>200</sup> However, despite these qualifications, there is no problem in principle with applying Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style to language, with sublexical composition as the primary (syntactic) vehicle of style in much the same way as use of a characteristic palette or configurational schemata might define style in painting. For language, like painting, is configured and where different syntactic schemes *are* found – say between English, French, Russian etc. – this clearly could be described as a difference in ‘style’ as Merleau-Ponty understands it.

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<sup>198</sup> Which Goodman (1976, 135 f.) defines as follows: ‘For every two characters K and K’ and every mark m that does not actually belong to both, determination that m does not belong to K or that m does not belong to K’ is theoretically possible.’

<sup>199</sup> It is presumably a necessary condition for the use of language to organize experience in a manageable way.

<sup>200</sup> Merleau-Ponty shows some awareness of this in suggesting that literary language differs from routine language use while standing in a relationship of ‘homonymy’ (*S* 96; cf. *PdM* 19 and *S* 113 f.). But despite often referring to the ‘coherent deformation’ it introduces, he does not detail how literary use distinguishes itself from common use.

## 5. Presentational sense as indirect sense

The notion of presentational sense was initially introduced somewhat schematically, in discussing Heidegger's view of the proper function of Articulacy, to refer to an aspect of linguistic expressions' meaning that is due to their form and in virtue of which they function to present features of the world in an articulate manner. The last two sections' discussion of indirect sense was intended to explicate the two fundamental components of this schema while taking account of the modifications – in particular, the emphasis on embodiment and the rejection of final determinacy – that Merleau-Ponty brings to Heidegger's general picture of language. Thus Saussure's conception of signs provides a detailed account of the notion of linguistic form appealed to, and correspondingly of the *structure* of presentational sense. Further, the analogy with painting, I have suggested, provides a model for understanding the presentational *function* of signs, as well as providing support for the Saussurean view of linguistic articulations as being inchoately rational and underlying conceptual units. This section undertakes three tasks. First and foremost it sets out several ways in which understanding presentational sense as Merleau-Ponty's indirect sense fills out Heidegger's view of the specific function of linguistic signs in a phenomenologically convincing way. It then summarizes how presentational sense meets the requirements previously identified for prepredicative factors, before finally identifying a basic inadequacy that Merleau-Ponty's conception of language shares with Heidegger's, leading to the need for an account of what was previously called pragmatic sense.

One obvious way in which Merleau-Ponty's conception of language remains true to phenomena is in its ontological commitments. Being set out in terms of behaviour, gestures, words and acts of speech, his conception of language assiduously avoids positing any linguistic entities that are not phenomenologically licensed. Yet rather than merely acknowledging, it seeks to do justice to the fact that these items, in particular words, are literally *involved in* the constitution of linguistic meaning. As seen in this chapter's first section, this was already a key aim for *PdP*'s discussion of language, even though its account of the way language is a 'vehicle' of sense rested on inadequate metaphors. But with the appropriation of Saussure's conception of signs this aim could draw on a more literal and articulate accommodation of the fact that sublexical structure is integral to the functioning of linguistic signs. In this way it

becomes possible to describe systematically – rather than metaphorically – two further phenomenological features, namely the perceptible differences between (natural, ‘national’) languages and the intuitively obvious significance of many grammatical features. For example, the ‘grammatical’ ordering of words into verbs, adjectives and adverbs typically relies on the use of standardized sublexical features that identify how their referents are being presented, say as a temporally occurrent process or event (verbs), a property (adjectives), or a manner of doing such-and-such (adverbs). Of course, there is no necessary link between such features and their referents – using a noun to refer to a process, for example, does not imply blindness to its temporal character. But they do have an expressive significance – these are the means we use to organize and present features of the world in such ways – that a phenomenologically accurate conception of language ought to respect as having a distinct function in meaningful language use rather than being ‘superficial’ features.

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of language is also in a position to address, in a phenomenologically plausible fashion, two problems previously identified with Heidegger’s view of signs as formal indications.<sup>201</sup> First, as already mentioned, the appropriation of Saussure’s position answers an open question by making explicit which features of linguistic form Heidegger tacitly relied on prior to and in *SZ*. On Saussure’s model linguistic articulation is understood to take place at the lexical and sublexical level, rather than centring on higher-level structures such as sentences, texts, or discourses. In this respect it coheres well with Heidegger’s view of propositions as ‘derivative’. But it is also phenomenologically plausible to think of linguistic articulation in terms of the distinct elements found at the lexical and sublexical levels, since higher-level structures – sentences, texts, discourses – are clearly composed of these. By the same token Saussure’s model also provides an answer to the question of how far down presentational sense goes, since by definition morphemes are the smallest units that can be considered to articulate a significant difference.<sup>202</sup> Hence the suggestion here is that presentational sense of linguistic expressions is due to the differences and distinctions inherent in the nexus of morphemes and their (relatively motivated) combination in words.

Second, Merleau-Ponty’s views also provide an important corrective to Heidegger’s picture of signs’ being internally linked with determinate grounding

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<sup>201</sup> Cf. page 64 above.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. page 66 above.

experiences and having the essentially atemporal function of simple preservation of original meanings.<sup>203</sup> To be sure, if scepticism about meaning or the possibility of communication is to be avoided, then at some level (say of texts) or under certain conditions (e.g. constant patterns of use) linguistic signs must be assumed able to preserve meaning. But, as Merleau-Ponty's view of the way indirect sense functions makes clear, this assumption cannot be made without qualification. For by introducing and compounding the effects of rational ambivalence, the processes of production and transmission of linguistic expressions expose the naivety of assuming individual signs to stand in some recoverable internal relation to determinate phenomena. Heidegger's view rests on an oversimplification which might be described – in the terminology of the preceding section – by saying he treats signs as concrete artefacts rather than type artefacts, and so attributes them with retrospective rather than situated interpretability. There is, to be sure, continuity between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in that both centre on the relationship between expressions and the phenomena of lived, or at least liveable, experience. In this sense both approaches are phenomenological. But although recurrent phenomena might provide a basis for stable patterns of expression, within the Merleau-Pontian picture there can be no underlying general assumption of simple preservation. Linguistic articulation instead issues in a field of type artefacts characterized by inchoate rationality and situated interpretability. The relationship between linguistic expressions and phenomena is hence reconfigured: rather than being internally linked with determinate phenomena, these characteristics engender the flexibility that makes individual linguistic expressions appropriate to a range of varying situations.

The difference is crucial: for Merleau-Ponty words do not have original contexts of sense; instead their expressive power is rooted in the here and now of lived experience. This is why Merleau-Ponty, unlike Heidegger, is able to acknowledge the genuinely temporal character of language. First, as has been seen, under Saussure's influence he valorizes the present of speech acts (*parole*): 'the power of language [...] is entirely in its present'.<sup>204</sup> While linguistic articulations remain semideterminate on principle, determinacy of meaning is maximized in

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<sup>203</sup> Incidentally – though to argue this is well beyond the scope of this thesis – it seems to me that, for all its naivety, this is an assumption that underpinned Heidegger's own philosophical methods throughout his work.

<sup>204</sup> *PdM* 58. Such presence, for Merleau-Ponty, is of course 'of the perceptive order' (*PdM* 41, 57, 53), i.e. perspectival, partial, or indirect.

particular utterances: ‘The act of speaking is clear only for whoever speaks or hears effectively’ (*PdP* 448). Second, he nonetheless conceives of acts of speech as embedded in a temporal horizon: The speaking present itself is not point-like, but temporally extended: ‘the [synchronic] system that is realized is never entirely in the act’. In particular, the linguistic present is privileged only as conditioned by the sedimented products or acquisition of its past such that ‘the contingency of the linguistic past intrudes through to the synchronic system’.<sup>205</sup>

Having incorporated these modifications – an articulate conception of linguistic form and the temporalization of linguistic phenomena – I want to suggest that the notion of presentational sense provides a phenomenologically plausible view of the role articulate form plays in linguistic expression. One aspect of this is that it cashes out Merleau-Ponty’s view of what it is for signs to be the ‘vehicle’ of sense. As described above, *SdC* had suggested that the key to this is ‘structural correspondence’ between signifieds and signifiers, while vaguely appealing to a ‘systematic principle’ inherent in the organization of the latter.<sup>206</sup> In *PdP* talk of a systematic principle had yielded to still more vague metaphors of singing the world and emotional essences. However, with Saussure comes the idea of a sign system (*langue*) with explicitly and exhaustively identifiable structural components. The organization of sign structure is now due not to a ‘systematic principle’ but to iterated intentional activity, yielding a differential scheme that is type artefactual and characterized by an inchoate mode of intelligibility. Nonetheless, in any given context of use it is the articulations inherent in this scheme of difference and distinctness that are used to organize experience of the world by picking out (corresponding) features of the world. Hence, though not in any obvious way comprising a ‘direct’ copy or representation of the world, linguistic articulations can fulfil the presentational function – pointing out features of the world, letting them be seen directly – that Heidegger thought of as proper to Articulacy in the allusive or ‘indirect’ way illustrated by Merleau-Ponty’s analogy with painting.

These improvements would be of no real interest, were it not for the fact that they accurately accommodate certain factors highly relevant in making careful or expressive use of language. For example, new linguistic expressions are usually

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<sup>205</sup> *S* 109, cf. *PdP* 450. Merleau-Ponty goes as far as to suggest that ‘the present exercise of speech’ involves taking up ‘all the preceding experience’ sedimented in language (*PdM* 59).

<sup>206</sup> *SdC* 132 f. (cf. page 83 above).

coined as recognizable combinations or modifications of existing words; and even where this is not the case, their coinage is often implicitly conditioned by existing forms, from which there is a need to be distinguished. In this respect Merleau-Ponty is certainly true to the phenomenology of creative expression. Alternatively, in seeking to express, or avoid expressing, certain nuances one might rely on thesauri, where words are grouped in ways that inevitably highlight their differences as much as their similarities. Again in translation work differences in word structure can generate difficulties, since words with equivalent patterns of use can present their referents in disconcertingly different or reassuringly parallel ways.<sup>207</sup> In each of these cases it is plausible to think of language as functioning as a differential resource the structure of which is embodied in the array of available sublexical and lexical forms. In this way the idea of presentational sense does justice to the phenomenological fact that words and their constituents are quite literally the means of which thoughts are composed. Linguistic articulations are expressive ‘materials’ embodying certain constraints, as Merleau-Ponty unsurprisingly points out, in much the same way as an artist’s colours (*PdP* 446). Moreover, what Saussure’s conception of signs captures well, and such examples illustrate, is that a term’s meaning or sense is often recognizably linked with the way relatively-motivated morphological features present its referents.

An interesting consequence of this is the ability to account plausibly for the significance of what John Austin (1979, 201) fittingly describes as ‘[t]railing clouds of etymology’, the fact that ‘a word never – well, hardly ever – shakes off its etymology and its formation’. Etymology adheres to words in the sense that their morphological features anchor certain associations or relations to other terms, in a manner typically elucidated by considering language historically. Such adherence can give rise to the idea that the meaning of expressions is best understood by considering their historically original meaning. This idea is sometimes thought to underlie Heidegger’s reliance – particularly in his later works – on controversial appeals to ‘etymology’ in his philosophical analyses.<sup>208</sup> In fact, it is far from clear that Heidegger had any specific interest in historical originality of meanings. To be sure,

<sup>207</sup> As just one example, the German term ‘Mitleid’ can be read as literally saying ‘with-suffering’, which to some extent makes ‘compassion’ a better rendition than the standard ‘pity’.

<sup>208</sup> Charles Guignon, for example, suggests that for Heidegger ‘the *true springs* of the meaning’ which Dasein discloses ‘are historical’, such that authentic being ‘brings about a new relationship to the past and history’ in which Dasein ‘remembers its historical roots and can find the underlying meaning of what is passed down in the tradition’ (Guignon 1983, 141, 139, 138).



already in *SZ* his whole project is oriented towards the ideals of proper ('authentic') disclosure and originality, with the ultimate 'business of philosophy' described as being to 'preserve the *force of the most elemental words*'.<sup>209</sup> But Heidegger's indifference to historical originality is strikingly illustrated by his treatment of the term 'phenomenology': while apparently appealing to the Greek etymology of its two 'constituent parts' to explain its meaning, Heidegger shrugs off the 'history of the word itself' as insignificant.<sup>210</sup> Perhaps there is no obvious incongruity in this claim insofar as Heidegger's primary aspiration – as set out above (section I.4) – is to sense-genetic originality, the sense inherent in 'grounding experiences' or phenomena, rather than to historical accuracy. Nevertheless, his model of signs' functioning implies that sense-genetic and historical originality cannot be fully dissociated. For if linguistic signs were internally related to and simply preserved their link with determinate phenomena, historical and sense-genetic originality would presumably be correlative, with historical origins being simply the first instantiation of a determinate sense-genesis. Accordingly, if etymology is indicative of historically original understanding, it would also be a useful pointer to phenomena.

By contrast the idea of accountability to determinate and recoverable sense-origins is undermined by a Merleau-Pontian picture of the evolution of linguistic expressions. And while it is still plausible, on this picture, to think of an expression's articulate – and relatively motivated – form being intelligibly linked with its meaning, the link relies not on the (perhaps determinate) intelligibility of a concrete artefact, but on the inchoate rationality of type artefacts. This revision is again phenomenologically plausible. For it suggests that, much as Heidegger assumed, etymological facts can be drawn on – say in cases of doubt, subtlety, ambiguity, neologism or metaphor – to clarify 'the meaning' of a word in the sense of clarifying how it is presenting its objects, which contrasts and associations underlie its differential feats. Etymological considerations can, in other words, shed light on what I have been calling the presentational sense of an expression. However, given Merleau-Ponty's view of the pervasive indeterminacy in the way language's past shapes its present, etymological facts can be neither an unfailing nor an adequate guide to what an expression means in present use. In this way it reflects the Austinian

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<sup>209</sup> *SZ* 220 (on this orientation cf. particularly 231 f.).

<sup>210</sup> *SZ* 28. – As well he might, given that the term was an 18th century coinage. For an informative survey of the history of the term's use see Spiegelberg 1960, vol. 1, 8-20.

insight that while it is true that words do not generally shake off their etymology and formation, it is equally true that the bind is not very tight – that the concern is with clouds rather than chains.<sup>211</sup>

It might be objected that the examples of expressive use cited and relied on here are inappropriately *recherché* – so to speak, a phenomenology of exceptions rather than the rule. This objection misconstrues the point of such examples here. It is not to suggest, as Merleau-Ponty indeed does, that such relatively unusual situations are explanatorily distinguished over more common ones, but simply that as contrast experiences they highlight features present, though not playing such a conspicuous role, in all use of language. Thus even when we use language routinely or ‘inauthentically’ in Heidegger’s sense – i.e. without being aware of its presentational import – the sublexical-lexical articulations to which presentational sense is due are nonetheless pervasive.

One aspect of the pervasiveness just mentioned is the fact that presentational sense meets the previously identified requirements to function prepredicatively. Thus the use of words is clearly implicit in the construction of sentences, and is in this sense subpropositional. It is also subinferential in both senses required for it to function foundationally. To begin with, because even when presentational sense is not being treated as inferentially relevant, features of linguistic form are still involved – so to speak, as mere syntax – in language use. But also because, as illustrated by the above examples, the differential structure of presentational sense can also be drawn upon and developed as a basis for justification. In this respect, the relatively motivated differences in linguistic articulation – Saussure’s *langue* – are the basis of words’ interpretability. They comprise a kind of ‘sense’ insofar as they are present in all language use and generate the possibility of developed interpretation. Possessing language, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, as a ‘principle of distinction’ (*PdM* 46) thus extends over different levels of competence, from the most basic (merely ‘syntactic’) mastery of sublexical forms through to the exploitation of structurally inherent

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<sup>211</sup> The result has an air of paradox: Heidegger, his atemporal model of language notwithstanding, apparently values etymological facts. Yet it is Merleau-Ponty, who disavows the historical perspective to focus on the living present of language, whose approach better does justice to the temporality of language and the relevance of etymological facts.

differences in inferentially relevant ways.<sup>212</sup> Finally, the idea that presentational sense functions as a heterologous foundation of predicative awareness is reflected in the distinction between sublexical and lexical (sign) levels of linguistic structure. Merleau-Ponty's claim that the 'logic of [language's] construction' cannot be 'put in concepts' (*PdM* 52 f.) points in this direction. However, his view is not that the predicative and prepredicative function in genuinely different (mutually irreducible) ways, but that conceptual or predicative properties are reductively explained by the dynamics of sublexical elements. But it was argued above that this reduction is implausible and that the possibility of constituted, distinct signs being the bearers of – e.g. inferential or referential – properties should be acknowledged. Distinguishing distinct signs and sublexical elements as different levels of organization provides a basis for the claim that predicative and prepredicative factors function in different ways. However, the idea of heterologous foundation requires not only that lexical properties presuppose the dynamics of sublexical elements, which I assume to be true, but also that these two levels of semiotic organization and function cannot be straightforwardly – i.e. in a 1:1 manner – mapped onto each other. What prevents this here is that they differ in the topology of their constituent units: not simply in that a language has many more lexical than sublexical items, but particularly because lexical items are themselves composed of sublexical forms.<sup>213</sup>

So far in this section I have been claiming that the idea of presentational sense allows a number of closely related improvements to the original Heideggerian picture of how linguistic signs function. Thus it does justice to the involvement of words, including sublexical form, in linguistic articulation, to the genuinely temporal character of linguistic sedimentation, and to the significance of etymological considerations. Finally it was highlighted that presentational sense also plays a foundational role since it is both consistent with prepredicative use and one means that can be exploited in predicative use.

All the same, Merleau-Ponty's conception of language has significant inadequacies. To begin with it provides an altogether more partial picture than

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<sup>212</sup> *PdM* 46. As Merleau-Ponty elsewhere points out, in order to start picking up the system of language the child must already have mastered – as a scheme of differentiation – its phonetic basis (*RdC* 34).

<sup>213</sup> Complexity of linguistic forms, and with this their power to differentiate features of the world, arises through the combination of simpler forms. Assuming words to be the bearers of conceptual properties, this explains why the logic of words' construction cannot be 'put into concepts'.

Merleau-Ponty seems to have supposed. One example, already highlighted, is that in concentrating on the role of sublexical elements, Merleau-Ponty neglects the possibility inherent in Saussure's conception of signs that the functioning of constituted signs might require describing in a way not reducible to sublexical dynamics. Similarly, while he recognizes that language has a genuinely temporal character, it would be wrong to think that the question of how language's past carries over into its present and future can be addressed simply at the sublexical level. Rather, the historical transmission of linguistic meaning involves a range of processes at different levels such as sentences or discourses and texts, as well as the 'linguistic units' focused on by structuralist linguistics.<sup>214</sup>

Two more trenchant problems with Merleau-Ponty's approach result from its systematic bias in favour of creative expression. The first is that it fails to identify any checks on the unfolding of expressive potentials, i.e. how words are involved in expansive *and limiting* processes that result – as Ricoeur (1969b, 71) aptly terms it – in a 'regulated polysemy'. This one-sided emphasis on openness and creative expression, which casts any sense-preserving language use simply as failing of expressiveness and hence 'secondary', fails to account for the stability of many expressions' meanings and to explicate the constraints effecting such stability. It fails, so to speak, to explain why language is not in expressive free fall.

Merleau-Ponty also fails, second, to account for the role played by a background of established use. The need to do this can easily be appreciated since, given the ultimate arbitrariness of the phonetic aspect of signs, in order to present entities in an articulate manner – i.e. to convey differences and similarities – signs must be interpreted in relation to standard patterns of use. To understand the resultant interdependency, however, a more detailed account of what Merleau-Ponty terms 'direct' sense is required. In fact Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the reliance of indirect on direct sense, and of creative on established expression.<sup>215</sup> Yet surprisingly he seems not to realize that this undermines his asymmetric claim to explanatory primacy on behalf of creative expression and indirect sense. This might be due to his tendency to associate the notion of 'direct' sense with the dubious metaphysical implication that intentional objects are presented in an idealized, nonaspectual

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<sup>214</sup> Cf. Ricoeur 1969a, 86. One such process being Gadamerian dialogue with texts of the past, as the merging of horizons amidst the 'the inconcludable openness of the occurrence of meaning' (Gadamer 1990, 476).

<sup>215</sup> Cf. page 93 above.

manner. However, the correct conclusion to draw is instead that what is needed is a conception of the 'direct' background for creative expression which does not require such eccentric metaphysical commitments.

It seems to me that these two problems have a common root in a failure to consider more closely the pragmatic dimension of language. For what holds a pattern of linguistic regularities in place, and so keeps expressive free fall in check, are the exigencies of living and acting in certain ways. And since what characterizes living in a certain way is a certain pattern of regularities, it seems natural to link an account of established ('direct') patterns of language use with the forms of life in which they arise. Indeed it is puzzling that Merleau-Ponty neglects practice in the way he does. For given his emphasis on existential and bodily significance (or lived sense) in *PdP*, it is far from clear that already constituted or established forms of expression should qualify as 'secondary'. Inauthentic, non-original, constituted speech instead bears meaning, is expressive, in all the same ways, and presumably with more vital urgency, than what Merleau-Ponty calls 'original' or 'authentic' speech. So one would expect a consistent phenomenological commitment to the lived present to focus on the world of everyday practice. In this light Merleau-Ponty's preference for highbrow literary language use as a paradigm evidences a disregard for lived experience – the world as experienced (*le monde vécu*; *PdP* iii) – and day-to-day embodiment that is incongruent with his own commitment to phenomenology.<sup>216</sup> Nonetheless, the failure to consider in any detail the link between language and action is a deficit Merleau-Ponty shares with Heidegger. Again this is surprising, given *SZ*'s emphasis on the foundational function of purposive understanding and its corresponding twofold instrumentalist view of (linguistic) signs. Thus while both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's conceptions of language are grounded in recognition of the pragmatic dimension of language, neither thought this sufficiently important or involved to deserve detailed discussion. Hence the solution to the two problems with Merleau-Ponty's conception of language converges with my attempt to fill out an account of pragmatic sense within the Heideggerian framework. What is needed is an articulate conception of the way linguistic regularities are linked with practice, without reliance on metaphysically bizarre 'direct' encounters with intentional objects. It is this we will find with Wittgenstein.

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<sup>216</sup> In taking creative expression as paradigmatic he even suggests that to understand language one should precisely *not* attend to the 'immediate practice of language' (*PdM* 165; cf. 43).

### CHAPTER III

## WITTGENSTEIN: THE PRAGMATIC ASPECT OF LANGUAGE

Two features of the late Wittgenstein's approach to language suit this to phenomenologically accurate description of the character of rules in linguistic practice, and so to the task of explicating the notion of pragmatic sense identified within the Heideggerian framework. The first is the key insight that the use of certain concepts is internal to corresponding forms of practice, such that the 'logic' of those practices is reflected structurally in linguistic articulation. As Wittgenstein puts it: '*Practice* gives words their sense' – 'the concept [...] is at home in the language-game' (VB 571; Z §391). The point of this, it will be argued, is that not only is the use of signs in a particular way constitutive of corresponding practices, but also, conversely, that acting in certain ways imposes practical requirements that determine the use of signs. To highlight this literal embedding and shaping of concepts within practice I shall call this conception of language a 'praxeological' one.<sup>217</sup> The second feature important here is the characteristic modesty that Wittgenstein's conception of rules takes on with the maturing language-game analogy. As will be seen, the late Wittgenstein not only affords rules a circumscribed role in linguistic processes, but reconfigures his conception of rules, in particular the notion of determinacy bearing on them, to reflect their attunement to empirical surroundings.

To begin with, several comments should be made about the approach to Wittgenstein to be taken here. First, because the above features could emerge only once Wittgenstein had dropped the calculus model of language, leading to greater reliance on the idea of language-games, it involves a selective textual focus. In this light 'late' writings such as the *Philosophical Investigations* (PU) stand opposed not only to the *Tractatus*, but also to texts of the early 1930s, up to and including the *Philosophical Grammar* (PG) of 1933. Second, my approach here is also selective in

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<sup>217</sup> Haller (1979, 1984) applies the term 'praxeological' to Wittgenstein. Skirbekk (1983, 9), describing a tendency in Scandinavian philosophy, characterizes praxeology fittingly as 'theory (logos) of action (praxis) [...] a conceptual analysis and reflective discussion of the way human activities are interwoven with their agents and with the things at which they are directed within our everyday world'.

foregrounding several motifs that bring out systematic aspects of the relation between language and regularities in practice. The aim is to show what means Wittgenstein provides for explicating the notion of pragmatic sense, not to claim that these motifs exhaust his conception of language. I will therefore be abstracting out and instrumentalizing Wittgenstein's views rather than offering detailed exegetic commentary or aligning myself to his philosophical aims.

With this in mind, a preliminary consideration is whether any determinate conception of language can be attributed to Wittgenstein, given *PU*'s claim not to be advancing any philosophical theses. A curt response might be that we are free to ignore Wittgenstein's own metaphilosophical views when reading him. But this would fail to address the potential difficulty that, whatever its content, no position could be said to represent Wittgenstein's own views. So for the present purpose it is advisable to be clearer about Wittgenstein's commitments and the sense in which views *can* be attributed to him. There are at least two approaches to what I shall call the 'no-thesis thesis', either of which could function as part of a 'therapeutic' philosophy aiming to liberate one from some, or even all, philosophical views. The straightforward, and textually well-founded, approach is to view Wittgenstein as an 'ordinary language philosopher'. On this approach, philosophical problems are the result of 'misunderstandings' fostered by linguistic forms, to be eliminated by returning words from a 'metaphysical' to their 'everyday' use.<sup>218</sup> This, Wittgenstein thinks, involves simply pointing out the obvious – that which is already open to view – so that any putative 'theses' would be accepted by everyone as commonplaces.<sup>219</sup> No 'theses' are involved because no theory is advanced; the method is simply to remind us of what we already know in making 'ordinary' or 'everyday' use of language. Although perhaps quaint, it is doubtful that this 'ordinary language' approach to philosophy is coherent. It is not, for example, clear that 'everyday' use of language can be delimited; nor, if it could, that this should be considered intrinsically more meaningful than other, 'non-everyday', uses of language; nor, even if that were allowed, why everyday language should be considered to eliminate philosophical problems, rather than simply failing to address them.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, even if the general approach were coherent, it would nonetheless rely on a conception of language – that

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *PU* §§90, 104, 109, 111 and 116, 94, 106 respectively.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *PU* §§89, 415 and 109, 126, 128, 599.

<sup>220</sup> As is well illustrated by Ayer's (1969) response to Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia*.

applying to, and perhaps manifested, in everyday use – as the basis for debunking ‘metaphysical’ abuses of language. However, quite apart from all this, it seems straightforwardly false to suggest that Wittgenstein does not have distinctive views about the nature of language – as evinced in his use of terms of art such as ‘language-game’, ‘grammar’, ‘forms of life’. In the light of such problems, it seems that in the straightforward form Wittgenstein’s no-thesis thesis cannot be taken at face value.

A more sophisticated approach to the no-thesis thesis is to treat Wittgenstein’s philosophical method, in particular his style of exposition, as nonthetic, i.e. as one that avoids actually positing any view. An example of this is presented by David Stern. Adopting Cavell’s view of the *PU* as a confessional dialogue between the ‘voice of temptation’ and the ‘voice of correctness’, Stern (1996, 444) claims that neither represents Wittgenstein’s own views and that these are ‘two opposing voices, opposing trains of argument, which form part of a larger dialogue in which they ultimately cancel each other out’. In this way the *PU*’s literary form would be a means of emulating the *Tractatus*’s self-abrogation, giving a whole new dimension to the no-thesis thesis and to Wittgenstein’s declared aim of pointing the way to peace beyond philosophy (*PU* §133). Stern’s proposal shares two difficulties with any interpretation of Wittgenstein’s method as nonthetic. The first is reconciling the supposed aspiration to ultimate neutrality with Wittgenstein’s clear and pervasive preference for certain views – expounded, after all, by the ‘voice of correctness’. Indeed, that aspiration should appear puzzling to Stern, since the whole point of (intellectual) confession is presumably to rid oneself of certain views, the temptations, and so to gain self-knowledge.<sup>221</sup> The second is exegetic implausibility. For Wittgenstein’s stated aim in *PU* (§§128, 599) is not to have no views, but to have only views that everyone can agree with. Moreover, there is no evidence – either in published texts or from other sources, such as notebooks, correspondence, anecdotes, etc. – that Wittgenstein intended to be read as not holding the views he apparently endorsed.

A more convincing approach, I suggest, lies somewhere between the preceding two. As will emerge in the following, Wittgenstein’s stated method is what might be described as ‘illuminating comparison’, i.e. offering comparisons or analogies to eliminate misunderstandings, say about the nature of language. Because

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<sup>221</sup> This seems to be Cavell’s (1962, 91 f.) own point in talking of Wittgenstein’s ‘method of knowledge’ and his ‘exhortation [...] to self-scrutiny’.



the aim of this is purely negative, and because this procedure is analogical in character, Wittgenstein's method can be said to be positing nothing. Even so, this method involves a conception of language as a means of comparison, and at least some degree of commitment to this conception in that it is considered capable of correcting misunderstandings. So while the sophisticated approach to the no-thesis thesis is right to think of Wittgenstein's method as nonthetic, the straightforward version is equally right to discern a preferred conception of language in the *PU*. – It is of course still of significance that Wittgenstein sought to avoid positive theses. This aim should be borne in mind in interpreting the *PU*, and it is presumably one factor underlying the *PU*'s unorthodox and cryptic literary form – which is surely intended to make it difficult to discern positive views and so to attribute to Wittgenstein a systematic theory.<sup>222</sup> However, the difficulty presented by Wittgenstein's no-thesis thesis is ultimately a practical rather than a principled one: although complicating exegesis, it does not preclude treating the *PU* as having a determinate and determinable conception of language – as I shall do in the sequel.

The task in the first two sections of this chapter will be to bring out those aspects of Wittgenstein's conception of language relevant to describing the regular use of language in practice and so to explicating the notion of pragmatic sense. The first focuses on the notion of language-games to illustrate and explicate Wittgenstein's commitment to the internal linking of practice and language, while the second tracks the implications of the maturing language-game analogy on his conception of linguistic rules. The third section looks more closely at the kind of grasp Wittgenstein's takes speakers to have of linguistic rules and identifies a minimal sense of rule-following that Wittgenstein relies on. The fourth section sets out how Wittgenstein's praxeological conception of language meets the previously identified requirements on a phenomenological notion of pragmatic sense, before the final section summarizes how it completes the picture of language outlined by the Heideggerian framework of chapter I.

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<sup>222</sup> Think of the often epigrammatic or aphoristic character of Wittgenstein's comments, their arrangement in a quasi-dialogical form reminiscent of both Plato and Augustine, or the loose overall arrangement of fragmented considerations into what is presumably not supposed to be a systematic whole. – For a perspicacious comparison of the aims and style of Wittgenstein and Augustine see Thompson 2000.

## 1. Language and the structure of practice

The intrinsic link between the use of language and practice referred to above is best understood by considering the notion of language-games. Although constantly relied on, and perhaps the most distinctive feature of his thinking from 1935 onwards, Wittgenstein's characterizations of language-games are terse and somewhat vague. In the earliest of these, in the *Blue Book* (*BIB*) from 1933-4, language-games are introduced as 'ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language'; they are 'primitive' or 'simple forms of language', from which 'we can build up the complicated forms [...] by gradually adding new forms'.<sup>223</sup> In *PU* the term 'language-game' is introduced, in §7, against the background of an example of a 'system of communication', or 'complete primitive language', used to coordinate work on a building site (§§3, 2). Repeating a claim made in both the *Blue* and *Brown Books*, Wittgenstein goes on to suggest that it is through such simple 'games' that children first acquire language.<sup>224</sup> The term 'language-game' is then introduced as applying to 'those games by means of which children learn their mother tongue', including simple rote-learning drills, and 'primitive languages'. Further explication comes in §23 with a sizeable list of examples of language-games such as giving orders, describing the appearance of objects, inventing stories, telling jokes, translation etc. Finally, in both these passages Wittgenstein highlights that language-games concern 'the whole process of using words', 'the whole: of language and of the activities with which it is interwoven' (§7). Indeed, the expression 'language-game' is intended to convey precisely that 'the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (§23).

It will be instructive to proceed by considering three apparent problems. First, it is strange that Wittgenstein links language-games with children's acquisition of language. Not only does this look like an (uncharacteristically) empirical claim – for which Wittgenstein offers no evidence – but it is far from obviously true that the examples of §23 are in any way specific to *children's* learning of language. Understandably perhaps, Baker and Hacker (1980, 52) claim that by the time of the *PU*, Wittgenstein had rejected the idea of an 'analytic-genetic' connection between

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<sup>223</sup> *BIB* 17. – The term also occurs several times in *PG*, which is based on a revised 1933 typescript (TS 213; cf. footnote 245). Although this use might antedate the *Blue Book*, the term is simply used in these passages without being explained.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. *BIB* 17; *BrB* 81; *PU* §§5, 7.

language-games and language acquisition. However, although §7 talks of this connection simply as something conceivable, thus freeing it of its empirical air, this claim is difficult to reconcile with both §7 and §5, both of which continue to imply the link.<sup>225</sup> What does seem beyond question is that language acquisition involves acquiring the ability to participate in the various kinds of practice Wittgenstein enumerates in §23, examples that do not in any way reflect the specificity of (children's) learning situations. It therefore seems that Baker and Hacker's intuition is correct and that, however Wittgenstein presents it, the idea of language-games does not require any specific link with language-acquisition scenarios. The point Wittgenstein is making, somewhat misleadingly, in talking of language acquisition is thus best taken as describing the constitution of linguistic competence in terms of the ability to participate in the various kinds of language-game.

Second, Wittgenstein's suggestion that language-games are 'complete' – albeit primitive – languages is often thought problematic.<sup>226</sup> Surely, the objection goes, nothing that qualifies as (human) language could be so impoverished. So isn't Wittgenstein simply wrong (e.g. §6) to suggest that a system of communication of the kind described in §2 could even *conceivably* be a 'complete' language? An indication of the weakness of this objection is that is so obvious: if it *were* a problem for his conception of language-games, one must wonder, how *could* Wittgenstein have failed to notice? Often the objection also has a question-begging air in relying on unstated or undefended assumptions about what language requires for completeness – simply brushing aside Wittgenstein's opposing thoughts on this issue.<sup>227</sup> But the main reason, I suggest, Wittgenstein was unconcerned about the conceivability of real human communities living in such impoverished ways is its irrelevance to his intended use of language-games. On this Wittgenstein is quite explicit: 'Our clear and simple language-games are [...] *objects for comparison* which, through similarity and

<sup>225</sup> §5 recommends studying 'the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of its use', explaining that 'the child uses such primitive forms of language when learning to speak.'

<sup>226</sup> E.g. Black 1996, 79, 81; Baker/Hacker 1980, 26 f.; Rhees 1970, 76, 81. Kenny 1973, 169 f. The same point is sometimes made with reference to the idea of a primitive 'form of life' (cf. Garver 1990, 181).

<sup>227</sup> Cf. *PU* §18 and *BIB* 19. – An alternative strategy is Marie McGinn's (1997, 50) claim that since there is 'no essential structure or function against which the notion of completeness can be defined', 'the idea of completeness simply doesn't apply' to language-games. In that case, why does Wittgenstein so insistently talk of 'complete' languages? A better answer is that he intends a different notion of completeness to apply, characterized by the absence of gaps. In this sense a small town, a child, and a language might all be complete, even though they will subsequently develop further. (On this kind of gap-free order in transition cf. *BIB* 44.) Wittgenstein's hope, expressed in the *PU* Preface, that his thoughts should form a natural sequence with no gaps also hints at this kind of completeness.

dissimilarity, are to cast light on the conditions of our language'.<sup>228</sup> Simplified language-games are thus a methodological device, typological or schematic sketches of situations intended to focus attention on certain features of linguistic phenomena. Their ability to fulfil this function does not depend on the conceivability of human life comprising only a given language-game. Rather, as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Brown Book* (81), to think of language-games as 'complete systems of human communication [...], it very often is useful to imagine such a simple language to be the entire system of communication of a tribe in a primitive state of society'. It is not necessary, but *very often useful*. To think of language-games as 'complete' languages is simply a heuristic expedient for treating them as distinctive linguistic subsystems.

Third, at first glance it might be doubted that Wittgenstein tells us anything informative about language-games. Having initially been somewhat casually applied to language-learning and primitive languages, Wittgenstein himself implies that 'countless different kinds of use of everything we call "signs", "words", "sentences"' are underlain by just as many types of language-game (*PU* §23). Hence, beyond the obvious connotation of having something to do with using linguistic signs, the notion of a language-game looks open-ended, unbounded, or undefined. Before either embracing this as part of Wittgenstein's theory-free approach, or complaining about the apparent indeterminacy of the language-game notion, it is clearly relevant to bear in mind Wittgenstein's views about the nature of concepts and concept-acquisition. For instance, it should be remembered that Wittgenstein does not think that vagueness in a term's application renders it useless.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, the discussion of 'games' in terms of family resemblance is intended to apply precisely to language-games: it is these that paradigmatically have nothing essential, 'not one thing at all in common on account of which we use the same word for all', and instead comprise a cluster of elements linked by case-to-case similarities (*PU* §65). Wittgenstein's view of concept acquisition corresponds to this: concepts are to be explained or defined by giving examples, suggesting how these can be extended by analogy, and expecting this to allow the term to be used in certain ways (*PU* §§69, 71, 75, 208). Which is clearly what Wittgenstein does in explaining the notion of language-games: gives examples, hints at its analogical extension, and expects us just to get the hang of it.

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<sup>228</sup> *PU* §130, cf. §5 and *BIB* 17.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. particularly *PU* §§69-71, and section 2.(iii) below.

Nonetheless, if it is to mean anything at all, there is a need to be clear about the point of speaking of ‘language-games’. A direct answer, found in the *Brown Book* (108), is that the function of a word ‘can easily be seen if we look at the role this word really plays in our usage of language, but it is obscured when instead of looking at the *whole language-game*, we only look at the contexts, the phrases of language in which the word is used’. In *PU* the same feature recurs in both Wittgenstein’s early use of language-games – in arguing that the uniformity (*Gleichförmigkeit*) of words conceals the diversity of their functions and that sentences do not have a single underlying form<sup>230</sup> – and their methodological role in eliminating misunderstandings (as Wittgenstein supposed) due to linguistic forms. At the very least, therefore, to talk of ‘language-games’ is Wittgenstein’s antidote to the philosophical inadequacy of considering language in a reductive formalist manner.

Against this background it seems reasonable to interpret the notion of a language-game as having two principal features. The first is to emphasize the embedding of language, qua the use of spoken or written signs, within the broader context of human activity. The point is not that linguistic acts are ‘speech acts’, acts that would (perhaps) be impossible without the use of language, or which take place ‘within’ language; nor does it allow them contingently to accompany ‘extra-linguistic’ actions, running in parallel like a film’s soundtrack. Rather, as Wittgenstein states, the point in talking of ‘language-games’ is that the use of signs is interwoven with, or part of, activity more generally. The term ‘praxeological’ is intended to express precisely this: that the logic inherent in patterns of language use is determined by the ‘logic’ of practices, or simply that the structure of language is intrinsically linked with that of practice, such that ‘everything that describes a language-game belongs to logic’.<sup>231</sup> As long as this intrinsic link between sign use and practice is borne in mind, it seems to me that Wittgenstein’s earliest characterization of language-games – as ‘simple forms’ of language use, from which ‘we can build up the complicated forms [...] by gradually adding new forms’ (*BIB* 17) – is also the best. The intrinsic link with practice means that simple forms ‘of language’ are simultaneously simple forms of activity or practice, which is why Wittgenstein can, and indeed does, treat language-games as the kind of components that make up language. The second principal feature of language-games is therefore

<sup>230</sup> *PU* §11. Cf. §§10-13 and 22-23, 65 respectively.

<sup>231</sup> *UG* §56. Cf. also §§51, 501.

to isolate simplified forms of language-using activity. However, while Wittgenstein thought that language could – at least for the purposes of comparison and eliminating misunderstanding – be decomposed into, or modelled in terms of pared-down typological situations, the general link between sign use and practice is treated as intrinsic and irreducible, as a feature indispensable for language-games’ functioning as ‘objects for comparison’.

I now want to look more closely at what the claim that the use of certain concepts is internal to certain forms of practice amounts to. To do this, it will be helpful to consider the difference between the language-games of §2 and §8 in *PU*. In §2 Wittgenstein describes a primitive language which ‘consists of the words “cube”, “column”, “slab” and “beam”’. This language is to allow ‘communication’ between two builders, such that when builder A calls one of the terms builder B hands A the corresponding object. In §8 this language is extended to include ‘a series of words used [...] like numbers’, the terms ‘this’ and ‘over there’, and colour patterns. This enables, as Wittgenstein points out, an extended range of commands to be deployed in the task of fetching building blocks. The language-game of §8 obviously differs from §2 in introducing new ‘kinds of words’ (*PU* §17). But rather than characterizing these in grammatical or logical terms, which he conspicuously avoids, Wittgenstein is more concerned with the underlying issue of what it is to differ in these ways. His general point is reasonably clear: By emphasizing the use (*Gebrauch*) made of expressions, their role in human practice or language-games, and the variety of functions served by linguistic ‘instruments’, he aims to highlight the inadequacy of the conception of language attributed to Augustinus in §1 that models the function of all linguistic terms on the paradigm of naming or referring to objects. The point of §8 thus seems to be to introduce terms that are difficult to assimilate to the paradigms of ostensive definition and naming.

But how does this count against the ‘Augustinian’ view? One might simply respond that in §8 too the basic function of linguistic tools is to refer, that the key difference between the concepts Wittgenstein discusses lies in their referential properties, and that precisely these explain their varying roles in language-games. In other words, why shouldn’t one insist on a uniform, reference-based explanation, and downplay Wittgenstein’s pragmatic perspective on language as *prima facie* appearance?

Wittgenstein's answer to this must be taken to include three claims. First, that referential (naming) relations are not primitive, i.e. something about which nothing further of 'semantic' relevance can be said. For while intimating that it will always be possible to say that a word 'stands for' (*bezeichnet*) something or other, Wittgenstein claims that generally speaking this is uninformative (*PU* §§10, 13; cf. §14). This is reminiscent of Heidegger's view that relationships between signs are 'easily formalized' in a way that 'levels off' their phenomenal content (*SZ* 78, 88). However, Wittgenstein differs from Heidegger in being more explicit about what gets lost in suggesting that what it is for something to be a referent can be explicated by describing corresponding language-games.<sup>232</sup> Second, Wittgenstein must be taken to be denying that extensions have explanatory primacy. This is to be expected, if describing language-games shows us what it is to be a referent, as this suggests that the role of expressions in language-games is extension-determining rather than extension-determined. Together these two claims imply that to describe the functioning of expressions merely in extensional terms is a superficial, philosophically unsatisfactory approach. The inadequacy Wittgenstein highlights lies in that, were it not for the different roles they play in our actions, we would have no grasp of the different ways in which, for example, concepts of number, colour, form etc. refer. So there is a clear asymmetry: someone who understands how the language-game works will understand what reference is in its context, whereas someone who understands which referents are being picked out need not understand what is going on. In fact, thirdly, the *PU* challenges the very idea of what might be called *simple referring*. For Wittgenstein not only relates the intelligibility of ostensive definitions to the context of language-games, and discredits the idea of primitive simples that might be referred to in an ideal language, but also suggests that to point to something in an inarticulate way is not to understand it (cf. *PU* §§28-37, 46-64, 261). The upshot of this is that any reference to entities or features of the world – *articulate referring*, as I shall call it – picks out a referent as a such-and-such, and that the language-game environment determines what this such-and-such-ness is.

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<sup>232</sup> *PU* §37. Hence Hintikka/Hintikka's (1986, 212) emphasis on the role of language-games in establishing '*the basic semantic links between language and reality* in Wittgenstein's mature philosophy'. This somewhat misleadingly hints that there is still a problem of contact between language and (nonlinguistic?) reality and such thing as 'basic' links. However, as Harris nicely argues, an important implication of Wittgenstein's later views is to break with the foundationalist idea that 'language touches or connects with the world only at certain points' since 'language is embedded in reality and vice versa' (Harris 1986, 43, 47).

Wittgenstein's own proposal can be understood only by clarifying what he means by the function or the role of words. It might otherwise be felt that his talk of 'roles' in a language-game, or 'forms of life', is just as uninformative as general talk of reference. To get clearer about the important difference between the language-games of §2 and §8, and so what it is for words to function in different ways, it will be instructive to consider a variation on the builders' language-game that I shall call §2\*: Imagine the builders of §2 always saying 'red brick' instead of 'cube', 'white marble' instead of 'column', 'grey concrete' instead of 'slab', and 'brown wood' instead of 'beam'. Each word of §2 is thus replaced by two, one (we can imagine) being used as a colour word, the other to identify kinds of material. What difference does this make? Does the use, or the role, of the composite expressions in §2\* differ from that of the simple expressions in §2? This question can be approached in two ways. On the one hand, to an onlooker attending to the conditions of utterance and the effects of various expressions their roles would look the same. To him the difference between the two language-games is merely notational.<sup>233</sup> On the other hand, if the expressions in the revised language-game are genuinely being used to refer to colours and materials, their roles differ in that the building blocks are picked out in different ways in the two language-games: What in §2 is identified as a cube simpliciter, is picked out in the new variation as a colour-material composite, i.e. as a red something and as a brick something etc.<sup>234</sup> So although the commands uttered in both cases are in some sense coextensive, the referring in §2\* is the result of a twofold determination. An indication of this difference in roles is that in §2\* one would expect speakers straightforwardly to understand hitherto unheard combinations such as 'red marble' and 'brown brick'. But even if not obviously manifested, the two language-games nonetheless differ in their internal structure.<sup>235</sup>

Though §8 brings an extension of, not simply a variation on §2, it is the second approach that sheds light on the relevant difference. As in §2\*, the positive

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<sup>233</sup> For example, this would be the conclusion for a Quinean anthropologist working with stimulus meaning (cf. Quine 1960, 26-79).

<sup>234</sup> Note in Wittgenstein's presentation of §2 the semantic function of the terms 'cube' etc. looks indeterminate. Of course, on the position Wittgenstein is opposing these words function as names, as labels standing for objects. But, so far as Wittgenstein's sketch of the builders' language-game goes, there is nothing to stop us thinking of these words as descriptions of form, or as imperatives directed specifically to the action rather than the objects to be brought. This indeterminacy is perhaps intentional, and no doubt congenial to Wittgenstein's aims.

<sup>235</sup> Incidentally, this is why reference is neither indeterminate nor inscrutable in the way Quine (1969b, 35) worries about. Knowing how to participate in the language-game entails understanding what 'the referent' is.



point of the §8 extension involves not simply new notation, i.e. different words that function in the same way, but new ‘kinds of words’ (*PU* §17), i.e. words that function in different ways. And what it is for words to function in different ways – as the comparison of §2 and §2\* shows – is to be involved in practices of differing internal structure. An effective way of highlighting this difference is to recall Wittgenstein’s claim that language and its concepts are instruments (*PU* §569). Instruments can be characterized in terms of both their internal and outward functioning, i.e. both how they work and what they are for.<sup>236</sup> The language-games §2 and §2\* differ in their internal, but not in their external functioning – just as two clocks might work in different ways while doing the same job. Introducing new kinds of word in §8 is thus tantamount to the introduction of both new (linguistic) instruments and new forms of practice – such as counting and identifying objects spatially or by colour, even where there is little difference in their outward function.

This kind of difference in the way language-games work can be used to show what is meant by saying that the use of certain concepts is intrinsically linked with certain forms of practice. This link – which is the basis of describing Wittgenstein’s conception of language as praxeological – has two aspects. On the one hand it brings out the fact that to deploy different concepts (not mere notations) amounts to acting differently, that ‘What one calls a change in concepts is of course not only a change in talking, but also one in doing’ (*BPP I* §910). A clarification is important here: it was previously suggested that two approaches can be taken in comparing §2 and §2\*, and that the role of expressions remains unchanged or is changed accordingly. These apparently conflicting claims can be reconciled by explicitly distinguishing the ‘role’ of language-games from that of expressions within them and saying – in terms used by Wittgenstein – that a language-game overall has a ‘point’, whereas words have ‘techniques’ of use.<sup>237</sup> Thus a language-game’s point is its outward function (what the game is about), whereas rules describing an expression’s use tell us about its internal functioning (how it works), so that comparison of §2 and §2\* illustrates different techniques of word use with the same point. The first aspect of the internal link is hence that differences in the internal functioning of a language-game, in the way words are used as instruments, constitute differences in the practice.

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<sup>236</sup> This feature of instruments is nicely applied to Wittgenstein’s language-games by Meggle (1985, 78 ff.).

<sup>237</sup> For example, Wittgenstein talks of the ‘point’ (*Witz*) of language-games in *PU* §§564, 142 and of ‘techniques’ (*Technik*) of word use in §§125, 262, 557 (cf. also §§150, 199).

On the other hand, the comparison of §2 and §2\* also illustrates quite clearly the second aspect, i.e. how engagement in certain forms of practice imposes constraints on the concepts to be used: ‘When language-games change, concepts change, and with the concepts the meanings of words’ (*ÜG* §65). The intuition here is that if you want to communicate on a building site you will need names for the different kinds of object; similarly, if you want to buy apples, you’ll need some kind of quantity words and type words for different kinds of fruit, etc. To be somewhat more precise, there is an implicit *practical requirement* that the language used be sufficiently unambiguous for the whole practice to work. The builders’ task, for example, requires distinct instructions for bringing each type of building block. In other words, getting the job done implies the need for a certain *degree* of distinction. This kind of requirement does not, as comparing §2 and §2\* shows, imply that the same end could not be met with different concepts – though to do so is *eo ipso* to engage in different practices. But it does imply that the concepts used are *pragmatically adequate*, i.e. that they meet the requirements implicit in the overall task of the language-game. With §2 the notion of practical requirements looks like a very clear-cut structural constraint: all that this simple task requires are four distinct commands. This might make the more articulate language of §2\* (16 possible expressions) appear to have redundancy as against the optimized (4 possible expressions) language of §2. But the transparency of this optimum is due to the simplified scenario, and in general the question of what is pragmatically adequate (‘what works’) and efficient is hardly likely to be tractable in the full economy of language.<sup>238</sup> Nonetheless, the idea of practical requirements can be generalized in two points. First, if it is to proceed smoothly, any practice will tend to impose the need for a specific degree of determination. Second, we would expect (to avoid needless inefficiency) there to be specific terms to refer to the objects, processes, agents etc. that are characteristically involved in that practice.

Two final points concerning the link between language and practice. First in the vague sense of according some kind of primacy to practice Wittgenstein’s view can be described as a form of pragmatism. Wittgenstein himself polemically disavowed pragmatism, taking this to be the view that to be true is to have the right consequences or to be useful (*PG* §133; cf. *BPP I* §266). But the use of this label is

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<sup>238</sup> E.g. because optimization would then apply across and among different language-games and be causally determined by what agents typically understand or confuse.

warranted by both Wittgenstein's focus on human practice as constituting linguistic meaning and his frequent likening of words and sentences to tools or instruments.<sup>239</sup> However, as I have tried to show, the praxeological conception is a quite specific form of pragmatism, according to which human practices quite literally shape word use, so that language-games comprise the locus of conceptual articulation.

Second, the idea of a structural link between practice and language can also be followed from the level of individual language-games through to the macrolevel, such that (as previously mentioned) linguistic competence as a whole can be thought of as incorporating the ability to participate in a corresponding set of language-games, as the sum total of articulatory abilities required by these individual practices. In this perspective the 'form of life' that manifests itself in a language can, again quite literally, be thought of as composed of the forms of individual language games – as the 'complicated form' of language built up from the 'simple forms' of language-games.<sup>240</sup> This composition of language-games into the whole of a language should not, however, be pictured as the juxtaposition of atomic or hermetic units. Rather language-games are, so to speak, in praxeological arrangement, combined such that they structurally and functionally interlock in roughly the way individual subroutines (functions) do within a computer program do.<sup>241</sup> An important feature of this idea of language as a functionally interdependent aggregate of constituent language-games is what might be called the *stratification* of such practices, the thought that there are different layers of practice, some of which build upon or exploit, and so presuppose, others. Wittgenstein himself often relies on the idea of such stratification: the ability to speak to oneself requires the ability to speak (*PU* §344; *LTSF* §855), to carry out arithmetic 'in one's head' presupposes arithmetic skills (*PU II*, 563), pretending to be in pain presupposes possession of the concept of pain (*LTSF* §§861-876), language-games of doubt presuppose certainty.<sup>242</sup> As Wittgenstein explains at one point, 'it is characteristic of our language that it arises on the basis of solid forms of life, regular

<sup>239</sup> Cf. *PU* §§11-12, 360, 421, 569. This pragmatist tendency is arguably – as Wittgenstein seems to recognize in §422 – more pronounced still in *ÜG*. For arguments of this kind cf. Moyal-Sharrock (2003) and Rudd (2005).

<sup>240</sup> Cf. *PU* §19; *BIB* 17. The use of the expression 'forms of life' at *PU II* 489 (cf. *LTSF* §862) suggests that it was also intended to refer to recurrent components – including language-games – of an overall 'form of life'.

<sup>241</sup> E.g. they have interrelated consequences, shared input and output, and respectively embody certain kinds of operation. – The 'roughness' of this analogy is indicated by Wittgenstein's critique of the calculus model (see the next section).

<sup>242</sup> *ÜG* §§115, 150, 160, 354 etc. – *LTSF* §803 points out the 'logical' character of such functional links.

doing. [...] We have a concept of which forms of life are primitive and which could only arise from such [primitive forms]' (*UW* 403 f.).

## 2. Real rules and their limits

The notion of rules is central to Wittgenstein's conception of language in two respects. To begin with it provides the principal means for conceiving of both techniques of word use and the typological structure of language-games. But it also connects with a traditional view of intellectual activity that sees, as Kant (1983a, 184 [B171]) succinctly puts it, the intellect as the 'faculty of rules' and judgement as the ability to subsume under rules. The thought that Rules Constitute Meaning (RCM) underlies Wittgenstein's frequent allusions to chess, and is explicit in his likening of words to chess figures, notably in his claim to be talking of language 'as of the pieces in the game of chess, by stating rules of play'.<sup>243</sup> It is therefore tempting, indeed I think quite common, to interpret Wittgenstein's reliance on RCM in a straightforward and *strict* manner, holding that rules are both necessary and sufficient for meaningful use of words. On this view, rules lay down the legitimate use of words just as rules define the 'possible moves' of chess pieces, thus distinguishing meaningful from nonsensical use. Although this view clearly appealed to Wittgenstein at one stage, this section will argue that his later views are characterized by a more relaxed attitude to RCM, corresponding to his abandonment of the calculus model of language and the maturing language-game analogy. Its task will therefore be to clarify why this shift came about, what it involved, and how it impacts on what the notion of rules can tell us about the structure of linguistic practices. The resultant view of the form and scope of language-game rules will tell us something about the general functional topology of pragmatic sense as explicated by such rules.

(i) *The incoherence of full determinacy*: A good place to start considering Wittgenstein's view of rules is the *Philosophical Grammar* (*PG*), which is characterized by both straightforward commitment to RCM and the attempt to combine the idea of language as a calculus with that of language as a game. The dominant, indeed pervasive, picture is that of language as a calculus: 'understanding of language [...] is of the same kind as understanding, mastering a calculus';

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<sup>243</sup> *PU* §108, cf. §31 and *PG* §§13, 23.

understanding a sign is to make ‘a step in a calculus (a calculation, as it were)’; ‘The proposition has its content as part of a calculus. Meaning is the role that a word plays in the calculus’.<sup>244</sup> The analogy between language and games is also found, but plays a subordinate role in Wittgenstein’s exposition. And although the term occurs, the idea of language-games is not systematically developed.<sup>245</sup> The hybrid of rule-system and activity that Wittgenstein here had in mind is epitomized in his comment that ‘Language is for us a calculus; it is characterized by *linguistic actions* [*Sprachhandlungen*]’ (PG §140). Given the fully rule-governed nature of a calculus, it is no surprise that Wittgenstein here foregrounds what he calls the ‘grammatical’ rules which are analogously to govern language: ‘We are interested in language as a process according to explicit rules’; ‘What interests *us* about the sign, the meaning that is for us definitive, is that which is laid down in the grammar of the sign’.<sup>246</sup> Nor is it any surprise that chess – a game played out in an apriori possibility space – is the example of a game that best suits the paratactic picture of language as calculus-game that Wittgenstein here envisaged.

Already in *PG* Wittgenstein’s reliance on rules is qualified in two ways to allow for differences between the ideal picture of a calculus and real linguistic phenomena. First, the *vagueness*, or ‘haziness of the normal use of our language’s concept words’ is acknowledged. Wittgenstein highlights that this renders such words neither ‘unusable’ nor inadequate ‘to their purpose’, which would be like saying ‘the warmth this oven provides is no good because you don’t know where it begins and where it finishes’.<sup>247</sup> Second, *PG* acknowledges the phenomenon of *inexplicitness*, i.e. that one can both learn a language without the use of explicitly stated rules and make meaningful use of a term without being explicitly aware of its definition (PG §§26, 13). At the time of *PG* Wittgenstein seems to have thought of *inexplicitness* as unproblematic. His concern, as in the *Tractatus*, was how meaningful use of language is constituted by semantic rules, not whether speakers have explicit knowledge of these, i.e. with the constitution not the epistemology of meaning. (Thus assuming that

<sup>244</sup> PG §§11, 13, 27. Cf. also §§2, 11, 19, 33, 39, 63, 68, 72, 80, 84, 110, 111.

<sup>245</sup> The term ‘language-game’ appears 8 times in total in *PG*, in §§5, 26, 81, 123, and Appendix 4 B. – Even then §26 intimates that in describing language-games one might not ‘still want[] to call them calculi’.

<sup>246</sup> PG §§32, 44. – A notorious difficulty of this interpretation is the vagueness of Wittgenstein’s notion of grammatical rules – e.g. are these rules syntactic (as the term ‘grammatical’ suggests) or semantic, constitutive or regulative? (Cf. *Lectures* 97 f. and Moore 1954, 292; Searle 1969, 33–42.)

<sup>247</sup> PG §76. A similar image – the light of a reading lamp – is used at *BIB* 27.

the former can be treated independently of the latter.) There is, however, some tension. Wittgenstein describes the sense of a sentence as both the role it plays in a calculus and what one says when asked about it (*PG* §84), as if these were in preestablished harmony. Accordingly, some passages (§§13, 84, 28) seem to suggest that speakers are able, when asked, to explicate the rules they are following. Assuming this ability by default, such that language remains rationally transparent in principle, reduces inexplicitness to a superficial phenomenon. However, elsewhere (§26) Wittgenstein seems to accept that speakers might have difficulties in explaining rules.<sup>248</sup> Inexplicitness is then a significant phenomenon, but when combined with the assumption that language is essentially a system of rules, it implies that speakers have ‘implicit’ or ‘tacit’ knowledge of rules: our language use is assumed to manifest rules that we must be assumed in some way to know, even though we might never have heard them explicitly stated and ourselves be unable to state them. Hence the question of *PU* §75 – ‘What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean to know it and not be able to say it?’

It is worth considering how Wittgenstein was able to reconcile these phenomena in *PG* with his then dominant picture of language as a calculus. The answer lies in a methodological stance which anticipates the *PU*: Already in *PG* Wittgenstein sees his philosophy as aiming to eliminate misunderstandings by clarifying our use of language (*PG* §§72, 32). To do this, he relies on a method of comparison: ‘We consider language *from the viewpoint* of a game according to fixed rules. We compare it with, measure it according to, such a game’ (*PG* §36; cf. §26). Thus Wittgenstein does not assert the factual reality of the calculus model of language, but offers it as an idealized picture for *comparison*, with the aim of clearing up certain misunderstandings. Once this concession is made, it is simply business as usual for the RCM principle. The phenomena of vagueness and inexplicitness of speakers’ knowledge can be accommodated, since neither directly challenges either the necessity or the sufficiency of rules to meaning constitution. Although suggesting discrepancies between the ideal picture of rule-governance and phenomenal facts, they can be thought of as concessions or anomalies, ways in which natural languages merely approximate to the calculus ideal.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> One complication is what counts as ‘explaining’ a rule. If this includes merely giving examples of use (cf. *PG* §§43, 28) explaining the rule scarcely differs from just applying it.

<sup>249</sup> Fluctuation in the real use of words is another anomaly, on this model, acknowledged in *PG* §36.

This helps bring into focus the relationship between *PG* and the later *PU*. It should be noted first that although often looking like conventional presentation of a systematic theory, *PG*'s clear statements about the nature of meaning are rendered ambiguous by this comparative method and must be taken not as straightforwardly advancing 'theses', but as offering a supposedly illuminating comparison. In other words, although not embellished with the rhetoric of the no-thesis thesis, a nonthetic approach is already found in *PG* and is not new to *PU*. As previously mentioned, this nonthetic approach relies on an underlying conception of language as a means for comparison which, although its empirical reality is not asserted, is nonetheless assumed to approximate well enough to the reality of language to dispel misunderstandings. It is here that the significant difference between *PG* and *PU* lies, with the calculus model being eclipsed by the language-game analogy. *PG*'s reliance on the calculus model is therefore significant in assuming both that it *is* an *illuminating* comparison, i.e. that it is a good model for dispelling misunderstandings, and that it is straightforwardly compatible with the games analogy and the latter's implications. The question is therefore: Why did Wittgenstein give up the calculus model as an analogy of language?

The answer is that he became convinced of the calculus model's incoherence. This conclusion emerges in the *PU*'s first discussion of rules (§§81-88) and their relation to the nature of concepts (§§65-88). The main target there is Frege's idea that concepts should be fully determinate, an idea that also animated Wittgenstein's own earlier calculus model of language (cf. *PU* §71; Frege 1994a, 31). The idea is that for an expression to have determinate meaning there should be no possible doubt as to its conditions of applicability, so that rules for its use will cover all conceivable circumstances. This idea is challenged in §84 of the *PU*: 'But what, then, does a game look like that is everywhere bounded by rules? Whose rules allow no doubt to creep in, block up all its holes? – Can we not think of a rule governing the application of the rule? And a doubt which *that* rule removes – and so on?' It is here, in §§85-7, that Wittgenstein introduces the difficulty of an infinite regress-of-rules: seemingly any statement of a rule can be misunderstood, requiring disambiguation by a further rule (statement), which can in turn be misunderstood, and so on. To block the possibility of such a regress in principle would seem to require rules that admit of no possible misunderstanding, or as Wittgenstein puts it 'doubt'. Yet, as Wittgenstein concedes, there can be no such regress-blocking rules.

The question of how this regress-of-rules argument is to be interpreted is particularly vexed. One interpretation is that Wittgenstein accepts the conclusion of this argument, so that rules are afflicted by principled indeterminacy, resulting in a general scepticism about meaning.<sup>250</sup> I want to suggest instead that Wittgenstein himself intends the regress-of-rules argument as a standard *reductio ad absurdum*, such that the absurd conclusion leads to a rejection of the premises that generate it. Thus viewed, the regress-of-rules argument reveals that the demand for a system of univocal, fully determinate rules – a calculus – underlying language is unstable in generating a regress that could be terminated only by the impermissible appeal to some ideally determinate rule structure. Its point is that, because it leads to incoherence, the *demand* for full determination by rules is to be rejected.<sup>251</sup> This interpretation of the argument is directly supported by both the way it is introduced (in §84, as just quoted) and concluded in §88. In §69 Wittgenstein had conceded that his view *might*, if a suitable definition of exactitude could be given, render concepts ‘inexact’. However, returning to this question, §88 concludes that there is no provision for ‘one idea of exactitude; we do not know what we are supposed to imagine this to be’. That is the implication of the regress-of-rules argument: we simply do not know what the demand for full determinacy, or exactitude, could amount to. This deficiency strikes at the heart of *PG*’s vision and cannot be protected by the nonthetic method: Since it is built around an incoherent conception of linguistic rules, the calculus model *cannot* function as an illuminating comparison – rather it is its intimation of ideal determinacy that sows the seeds of confusion.<sup>252</sup> It is this insight, I suggest, that separates *PU* from *PG*: the calculus model is dropped – cannot coexist with the language-game model – simply because it is, or at least Wittgenstein believed it to be, incoherent.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> This is the essence of Kripke’s (1982) view. As the following will suggest, I believe this view to be both exegetically and philosophically problematic. Beyond setting out my alternative (‘nonsceptical’) interpretation of this argument, however, considerations of scope and relevance here preclude detailed engagement with Kripke’s ‘sceptical paradox’ – which, after all, §201 dismisses as a ‘misunderstanding’ – and the debates it has spawned.

<sup>251</sup> Incidentally, this argument in no way turns on whether rules are ‘explicit’ in agents’ awareness or merely ‘implicit’ in the practice. In particular, there is no intimation that the regress problem afflicts only ‘explicit’ rules, such that either ‘implicit’ awareness (Brandom 1994, 20-30) or ‘knowing how’ (Ryle 1990) serve to block the regress.

<sup>252</sup> Hence shortly after *PG* Wittgenstein changed his mind, seeing the comparison with exact rules as the source of, rather than the answer to philosophical misunderstandings of language (*BIB* 25).

<sup>253</sup> This is congenial to McDowell’s insistence that the regress of ‘interpretations’ should never be allowed to start. However, the present interpretation of the regress-of-rules argument has the advantage of making clear that this is not dogmatic insistence on a supposed bedrock of normativity. The overall



If the regress-of-rules argument is, as I have suggested, intended as a *reductio*, the incoherence of ideal determinacy ought to be taken not as denying the phenomenon of linguistic rules, but as requiring them to be conceived in some other way. The following two subsections attempt to show that this was Wittgenstein's response: that having dropped the calculus model he developed the language-game analogy further, leading to a revised overall picture of rules and their role in language. Tracking the way Wittgenstein reconfigures his conception of rules to avoid recourse to an ideal of determinacy, and the limitations he sees in the role of rules in language-games will thus serve not only to clarify Wittgenstein's view of how language-games are structured, but also provide further, indirect support for the interpretation of the regress-of-rules argument just suggested.

(ii) *Rules reconfigured*: The subsequent reconfiguration of Wittgenstein's conception of rules can be characterized in terms of two main features. The first of these is what I shall call an *empiricization* of rules. The outward signs of this are that in *PU* rules are conspicuously mundane: they are calibrated to 'normal conditions', explanations of them are somewhat ad hoc, serving to eliminate particular, rather than all conceivable uncertainties (*PU* §87; cf. §142). It also emerges in Wittgenstein's terse response to the regress-of-rules argument in §85: whether a given sign, explanation, definition etc. is sufficiently clear or prone to misunderstandings is not settled by an underlying calculus, but is an empirical matter. Given Wittgenstein's frequent emphasis on the difference between grammatical and empirical claims, this grounding of his conception of rules in empirical facts might appear puzzling. So what is the point of this claim? Superficially it might seem to be either an acquiescent matter-of-fact response to the regress-of-rules danger, or to suggest that it is just a contingent fact that we and the signpost manage to do the right thing most of the time. But there is a more subtle point to the claim that signs are 'in order' when they fulfil their purpose 'in normal conditions' (*PU* §87). For if there were no general agreement in judgements about, say, how to interpret signposts, then signposts would not be fit for their purpose, in which case either we would have a different solution to the problem of indicating directions, or that kind of practice would not be possible in human life.

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approach here is distinguished by taking Wittgenstein's talk of practices, customs and institutions as a significant commitment, a view to which McDowell was initially sympathetic, but later – appealing to the no-thesis thesis – rejects as un-Wittgensteinian (cf. McDowell 1984, 342; 1992, 50 f.).

Thus it is presupposed with regard to anything correctly described as a rule characterizing human action that there is some such normal agreement in judgements; if there were not, there would simply be no rule.<sup>254</sup> Accepting causal facts as the ‘framework’ underlying our language’s operation (*PU* §240) is thus not simply an intellectual quietism, nor indeed an indirect solution to a supposed rule scepticism. It is instead part of Wittgenstein’s response to the incoherence of his earlier conception of rules. For the appeal to ‘normal conditions’ meets the requirement for a background of regularity that Wittgenstein now considers necessary in talking of rules.<sup>255</sup>

This first feature is more pronounced still in Wittgenstein’s post-1945 thinking, where linguistic rules are accepted as exhibiting characteristic features of empirical rules. This can be well illustrated with several comments from the so-called *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* (*LTSF*): In describing the use of words ‘we must find something characteristic in these individual cases, a *kind* of regularity’; bearing in mind that ‘we don’t learn the use of words with the help of rules’, Wittgenstein explains that there is a ‘rough lawfulness’ in the use people actually make of words.<sup>256</sup> The way to interpret these comments, I suggest, is that Wittgenstein – though he might have not put it in such terms – now saw linguistic rules as being similar *in form* to statistical rules, with normal conditions characterized by greater or lesser degrees of distribution, just as normal (Gaussian) distributions are characterized by values spread around an average. Occasionally rules will be sharply defined, but in general ‘it is not fixed in advance that there is a such thing as “a *general* description of the use of a word”’. And if there then is such a thing – then it is not fixed how determinate such a description has to be’.<sup>257</sup> In this vein Wittgenstein even declares that the ‘greatest difficulty’ in his ‘investigations is to find a way of representing vagueness’.<sup>258</sup> Wittgenstein’s frequent talk of characteristic features of language-games and his suggestion that words have a ‘physiognomy’ can be seen as a response to this difficulty.<sup>259</sup> For in the physiognomical analogy these are empirically

<sup>254</sup> Cf. *PU II* 573. This point is highlighted by Baker/Hacker (1985, 249 f.).

<sup>255</sup> Cf. *PU* §§199, 207 as well as page 171 above.

<sup>256</sup> ‘*UNGEFÄHRE Gesetzmäßigkeit*’ (*LTSF* §968; cf. similarly §211).

<sup>257</sup> *LTSF* §969. – ‘That we *calculate* with certain concepts, [but] not with others, merely shows how different in kind conceptual tools are (how little reason we ever have here to assume uniformity)’ (*BPP I* §1095).

<sup>258</sup> *LTSF* §347. A corresponding claim is found at *PU II* 575.

<sup>259</sup> *PU* §568. For further examples of physiognomical imagery cf. §§235, 167, *PU II* 547, and *BPP I* §654.

salient features which contrast with momentary expressions, with their discernment depending on (empirically instantiated) patterns of circumstances. On this empiricized picture the notion of a rule admits, and will generally be characterized by, some tolerance or vagueness (*Unschärfe*), so that conformity with rules is gradual in character. To protest that such empirically contoured rules are ‘not rules’, or not useable as rules, would be to make precisely the mistake the *PU* inveighs against, namely to lapse into thinking that (all) rules must be ideally determinate or precise. Admitting a graduated transition between the two does not endanger the distinction between clear cases of conformity and nonconformity to rules.<sup>260</sup>

This empiricization tendency is also reflected in *PU*’s picture of the language-world relation. An apparent complication here is that for Wittgenstein language-games clearly have some kind of operational structure or logic that cannot be reduced to causal facts or regularities. This view, sometimes referred to as the ‘autonomy’ of grammar or language, is advanced most clearly and most forcefully in *PG*: ‘Grammar is accountable to no reality. Grammatical rules first determine meaning (constitute it) and are hence responsible to no meaning and [are] to this extent arbitrary’.<sup>261</sup> This ‘autonomy’ vis-à-vis reality encompasses four claims: The structure of language, as ‘grammar’, cannot be understood in terms of (a) purposes that language has, (b) the effects of language use, either intended or actual – including on agents, or (c) true representation of the world; rules of language are hence (d) arbitrary and conventional.<sup>262</sup> These claims are an important part of the overall picture of language in *PG* and its strong commitment to a scheme-content dualism: as a calculus, language is there considered an apriori medium of meaning constitution, with language-world ‘connections’ being set up by ‘ostensive explanation’ (*PG* §138). Now there are admittedly vestiges of these views in *PU*, with comments suggesting that language-games should not be understood in relation to effects (*Wirkung*) and a

<sup>260</sup> The empiricization of rules is also in evidence in *ÜG*. While emphasizing attunement to ‘normal conditions’ (§27), Wittgenstein there allows that rules and empirical claims differ gradually (§§51-2, 98, 318-9, 321, 454) and acknowledges that rules of language are ultimately empirical (§519).

<sup>261</sup> *PG* §133. The actual term ‘autonomy’ is found in *Zettel* (§320) paralleling part of *PG* §133. ‘That grammar is autonomous, arbitrary, not justified by reference to reality’ has been emphasized by Baker and Hacker as ‘a deep leitmotiv of Wittgenstein’s later work’ (Baker/Hacker 1980, 76; cf. 1985, 329 ff.). It is significant, however, that explication and substantiation of this claim typically relies not on *PU*, but on *PG* and *Z* – the latter being a source of particularly uncertain status (cf. von Wright 1982, 136).

<sup>262</sup> *PG* §§133, 140; 135-6, 140; 134; 133-4, 138. – The first two claims are presumably part of Wittgenstein’s attempt to distance his view from pragmatism (cf. page 150 f. above).

passing allusion to the conventional character of language.<sup>263</sup> And in §497 Wittgenstein suggestively writes ‘The rules of grammar can be called “arbitrary”, if this is supposed to say that the purpose of grammar is only that of language’.<sup>264</sup> However, this is manifestly *not* to claim that language (hence grammar also) does not have purpose(s) in terms of which it might be described, and indeed the requirement that sentences should have some function is used to challenge the idea that grammar is ‘arbitrary’ in §520. It seems to me that this signals a significant, and judicious, weakening in *PU* of claims to the ‘autonomy’ of language. For whereas *PG*’s dualism makes it look like a mere coincidence that language has anything to do with the real world, the whole idea of language-games is to be intrinsically bound up with the rest of the world. Consequently, although the structure of language-games cannot be described straightforwardly in causal terms, language can no more be thought of as ‘autonomous’. It must instead be thought of as *attuned to the world*, being largely shaped by the purposes that language-games are to serve and – on pain of language-games’ breaking down (*PU* §142) – ‘normal’ causal conditions.<sup>265</sup>

The second main feature of Wittgenstein’s reconfigured conception of rules is that they are conceived without any recourse to an ideal of determinacy. As mentioned above, in *PU* §85 Wittgenstein explains that it is an empirical claim whether or not a rule gives rise to doubt or is open to interpretation. The immediate point of this comment is clearly that although in practice we usually understand signs in a certain way, it is possible to think of alternative interpretations of them (cf. *PU* §201). However, as it comes in the context of a critique of the ideal of full determinacy (cf. *PU* §84), the key question is what this comment tells us about the relationship between language and determinacy. In this respect the claim is that there are not rules to cover every eventuality, but that there is a degree of determination which usually suffices for practical purposes. This claim can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation makes it an expression of resignation in the face of intellectual anxiety: ‘sufficiently determinate for practical purposes’ here sounds like

<sup>263</sup> Cf. *PU* §§149, 498 (also the unnumbered note around §30); 355.

<sup>264</sup> There is also an obscure invitation to ‘consider’ the claim that rules of grammar are arbitrary in §372. – The apparent justification for the above claim is that grammar does not tell us ‘how language must be built to fulfil its purpose’ and simply describes the use of signs (*PU* §496). But this can easily be understood in the sense, discussed above in section 1, that differently functioning words can fulfil the same purpose.

<sup>265</sup> As Mulhall puts it, the late Wittgenstein recognizes the ‘embeddedness of the normative within the natural’, and ‘relocates normative or logical determination within the realms of time, history, and society, without conflating it with empirical determination’ (Mulhall 2001, 112, 121).

‘well, we get by, but isn’t that surprising, given that the rules we follow are in principle indeterminate’. This suggests a perpetual difficulty of principled indeterminacy, such that language use involves constantly deciding among an inexhaustible range of options. However, the vertiginous character of this interpretation results from acknowledging the desideratum of greater determinacy than that actually required. Which seems to miss the point of Wittgenstein’s critique of the idea of full determinacy. For acknowledging this desideratum is a slippery slope, an iterative tendency that could be halted only by some ideal terminus. But since – as the regress-of-rules argument shows – there is no such thing, full determinacy cannot be a standard that actual language-games fail to live up to.

Against this it seems to me that Wittgenstein’s praxeological conception of language suggests a less timid interpretation of the claim that a certain degree of determination usually suffices for practical purposes. Something like this was encountered above (section 1) in discussing the practical requirements implicit in language-games. Its importance, I suggest, is that determinacy is a practice-immanent and practice-relative notion, such that what suffices for practical purposes, i.e. is pragmatically adequate, becomes the *criterion* of determinacy. To say that the rules we follow (‘normally’) suffice for practical purposes is then not to express resignation, but to say that they meet the *standard* of determinacy required to act in the relevant way. It should be noted that Wittgenstein does not, strictly speaking, present things in these terms. Nonetheless, there is evidence for attributing to him this, as I shall call it, *pragmatization of determinacy*. For example, *PU* §69 claims that strict definition of concepts is relative to particular purposes, §88 strongly hints that exactitude should be understood as practice-relative.<sup>266</sup> Wittgenstein also insists that possible doubt does not entail actual doubt (§84), or even that one ‘could have doubted’ (§213; cf. *UW* 399), and that doubts – particularly sceptical doubts – stand in need of motivation (*ÜG* §392). These claims can be understood in the light of Wittgenstein’s view that taking some things to be certain – i.e. in a particular way, at a particular degree of determinacy – is constitutive of any language-game. That one ‘could not’ have had ‘conceivable’ doubts is a praxeological impossibility in the sense that acting in such-and-such a way constitutively excludes certain questions.<sup>267</sup>

<sup>266</sup> The same point is nicely made at *Z* §440 with regard to traffic regulations.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. *ÜG* §329. – The ‘kind of certainty’ characterizes each ‘kind of language-game’ (*PU II* 569).

On this second interpretation, rather than accepting and stoically facing up to principled indeterminacy, Wittgenstein provides an alternative view of what comprises semantic determinacy. It remains the case, of course, that where rules are found, a greater degree of determinacy can be thought up, a ‘doubt’ requiring a further rule to settle it. However, on this second view someone who proposes the ‘doubt’ is not identifying an ambiguity operant in the established practice, but is entertaining the prospect of a different, extended, form of practice in which a new choice, or a new degree of freedom, does play some role.<sup>268</sup> If this new form of practice has some practical point or importance, one would expect it to lead to an improvement or sophistication of the original language-game. But once a language-game fulfils its purpose (e.g. as the use of signposts does) then the new doubt simply introduces redundant ‘determinacy’, the kind of decision that plays no role in actual practice. Wittgenstein concedes that one could imagine people thinking with a far higher degree of determinacy than ‘we’ do, but highlights that more precise concepts might not have the same practical value (*PU II* 510, *LTSF* §267). Hence his attitude towards philosophical ‘doubts’: if these play no role in, and lead to no improvement in practice, the determinacy they aspire to is redundant – a spinning of wheels not connected to the relevant mechanism.

(iii) *Rules constrained*: A second major aspect of Wittgenstein’s response to the breakdown of the calculus model is to see rules as having a more circumscribed role in linguistic phenomena. As has been seen, two qualifications to the role of rules – vagueness and inexplicitness – had already been acknowledged in *PG*, but while acknowledged as features of real linguistic phenomena, both looked anomalous in the optic of the calculus model. Freed of this model’s constraints these phenomena are cast in a different light in *PU*, becoming integral parts of Wittgenstein’s revised view of rules.

The notion of vagueness plays a prominent role in *PU*.<sup>269</sup> For example, in discussing games Wittgenstein allows ‘that the extension of the concept is *not* closed off by a limit’ (*PU* §68) and suggests that, though the use of terms can be fixed for certain purposes, this is not normally the case. And with his rejection of ideal

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<sup>268</sup> Cf. *UW* 396, 305. The implication is that to have a doubt presupposes a conception of what it is to have that doubt, of what that doubt amounts to in practice (cf. *ÜG* §§89, 120). This is a highly nontrivial requirement that is routinely neglected by those troubled by the ‘indeterminacy’ of rules.

<sup>269</sup> It is a principal theme of *PU* §§65-80, 99-101, but cf. particularly §§69-71.

determinacy, Wittgenstein's emphasis that 'inexactness' does not make a term 'unusable' is particularly poignant (*PU* §88). In *PG*, despite acknowledging the practical acceptability of vague terms (§76), Wittgenstein did not allow this insight to affect his reliance on the calculus model of language, with its constant intimations of the desirability of full determination. Vagueness was there an inconvenience, to be reconciled with the calculus model via a noncommittal method of comparison, rather than a positive and integral aspect of *PG*'s conception of language. The situation is fundamentally different in *PU*. For once the ideal of univocal 'exactness' is discredited by the regress-of-rules argument, 'vagueness' can, and indeed must, become an integral part of Wittgenstein's positive conception of language, a fact reflected in both his discussions of determinacy and in the empirical form of rules attuned to statistically normal circumstances.

Similar considerations apply to the theme of inexplicitness. In *PU*, as in *PG*, Wittgenstein allows both that language can be learned without the use of explicit rules, by observing and getting the hang of it, and that speakers need not have an explicit awareness of the rules they are following in competent use of language.<sup>270</sup> The implication of this is that there are two kinds of criterion for adherence to rules: the ability to instantiate correct use and the ability to explain, or form a conception of, that pattern of use – or, as Wittgenstein himself puts it in *PG* (§42), 'samples of use' and 'stating the rule'. In this perspective acknowledging inexplicitness means accepting the possibility of a mismatch between a speaker's abilities to instantiate and to state rules governing language use. Again in *PG* the phenomenon of inexplicitness was anomalous, causing difficulties from which the calculus model needed protection through the nonthetic comparison method. Since in a calculus each step must be covered by a statable rule, the kind of rational opacity such a mismatch suggests conflicts with the demand for rational scrutability implicit in the calculus model. On this model there is no provision for the abilities to produce and to conceive of correct moves to come apart, so that inexplicitness can only look like a failure of competence. In addition, as mentioned above, when combined with the assumption that rules underlie all meaningful use of language, the phenomenon of inexplicitness generates the need for an account of 'tacit knowledge' – of what it is to know a rule one cannot state. Again the situation is fundamentally different in *PU*. For once the

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<sup>270</sup> *PU* §§31, 54; cf. §89 and *ÜG* §95.

calculus model is rejected, there is no need to assume that the abilities to instantiate and explain rules are correlative. Hence, *PU* allows the possibility of using language in a way we cannot explain, such that we might find our own use of language reflectively opaque.<sup>271</sup> In such cases Wittgenstein's advice is to 'let yourself be *taught* the meaning by the use' (*PU II* 550). This kind of mismatch is presupposed by the inability to survey (*übersichtlich darstellen*) our use of words which §122 describes as a 'main source' of our lack of understanding. Indeed, if the abilities to instantiate and conceive of correct use were in perfect equilibrium, such misunderstandings – the Augustinian quandary (cf. *PU* §89) that Wittgenstein sees as characterizing philosophy – could presumably never arise. Furthermore, in the *PU* perspective there is no need for confusing terms such as 'tacit' or 'implicit' knowledge of rules – terms which seem inappropriate in describing rules manifested in linguistic behaviour. Instead so-called 'tacit' knowledge can be equated with the ability to produce a certain pattern of use; so-called 'explicit' knowledge with the ability to form some conception of these patterns.

As contrasted with *PG*, however, *PU* also introduces two new constraints on the scope of RCM. The first of these, which I shall call *contextuality*, is suggested by Wittgenstein's consideration of making up or changing the rules of a game 'as we go along' (*PU* §83). He introduces this by imagining people playing with a ball in a way that seems to be interrupted and modified randomly, suggesting that someone might claim the 'people are playing a ball game the whole time and so complying with *determinate rules at each throw*' (italics added). Admittedly, the point of this comment is not immediately clear. Taken literally, it seems to affirm that rules are present, always defining the activity, even though they are constantly changing. In this way it might be interpreted as a stubborn defence of RCM. Nonetheless, the context of this comment makes clear that it is intended to show the absurdity of such a stubborn defence and the notion of rules it relies on. Wittgenstein not only considers a background of regularity, of normal conditions, a necessary component of rules, but unequivocally excludes application of the notion of a rule to one-off cases in *PU* §199. This is also the message of the immediate surroundings of §83: §81 initiates

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. the unnumbered note around *PU* §139. The possibility of a mismatch and a dialectic between these two aspects of linguistic competence is nicely highlighted by Burge (1989, 182): 'In attempting to articulate one's conception of one's concept, one's conceptual explication, one naturally alternates between thinking of examples and refining one's conceptual explication in order to accord with examples that one recognizes as legitimate'.



Wittgenstein's critique of his previous view of language as a calculus 'according to determinate rules'. §82 then mentions three criteria for the presence of rules, while hinting that none might be fulfilled. Finally, §84 recalls Wittgenstein's view (already expressed in §68) that the use of words is not everywhere bounded by rules before adducing the regress-of-rules argument against full determination by rules. In this context the idea of each throw being according to determinate rules (§83) is clearly a desperate attempt to find omnipresent rules underlying meaning.

All the same, in talking of 'rules' that are made up as we go along, Wittgenstein allows a certain ambiguity to persist. The reason for this, I suggest, is that this possibility picks out a difference which he wanted to respect between contextual correctness conditions and more broadly established patterns of regularity. For despite introducing a verbal difficulty in interpreting §83, 'rules made up as we go along' (contextual correctness conditions) would allow things to be done rationally without their being covered by an overarching system of rules, which would accord with the dominant line of argument in §§81-88. Thus the suggestion here is that in *PU* Wittgenstein has a bipartite notion of correctness conditions – covering both general patterns (rules) and contextual correctness ('rules made up as we go along')<sup>272</sup> – and that rules, in Wittgenstein's sense of general patterns, are not necessary to meaning.

The final constraint on the scope of RCM can be called *nonregulation*: the fact, which Wittgenstein supports with the regress-of-rules argument, that the 'application of a word' is not 'everywhere bounded by rules' (*PU* §84). Considering the objection that this would leave the use of an expression 'unregulated', Wittgenstein responds that 'there is also no rule, for example, as to how high, or how hard, the ball may be thrown in tennis, yet tennis is a game and it too has rules' (*PU* §68). As presented, this is the modest claim that an activity can still be said to be determined by rules even where rules do not fully determine the possible moves. However, I think it is important that this brings out a crucial aspect of the games analogy, insofar as games are a kind of activity in which not everything is determined by the rules. Some evidence that Wittgenstein shares this view is found in his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (*BGM*), where he considers a 'game' in

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<sup>272</sup> Evidence of the latter can also be seen in Wittgenstein's reliance on the idea that sense can be made of bizarre sounding sentences by specifying the particular conditions in which they might be used (*PU* §117; *ÜG* §§ 25, 413, 423, 622). – Recall also Wittgenstein's polemics in the *Blue Book* (18) against philosophy's 'craving for generality', its 'contemptuous attitude towards the particular case'.

which it turns out that whoever makes the first move is predetermined by the rules to win. Wittgenstein denies that such a situation – i.e. one fully determined by rules – would be called a ‘game’ (*BGM* III §77; VII §§13, 27). What Wittgenstein is here rightly acknowledging is that it is essential to games that there is some openness, some leeway or ‘Spielraum’, in which the game unfolds.<sup>273</sup>

So once Wittgenstein accepted the instability of the demand for full determinacy, the language-game analogy was liberated from its forced coexistence with the calculus model.<sup>274</sup> The result, as just seen, is that the latter’s exclusive view of linguistic competence as a rule-following capacity was replaced by an overall picture in which rules have a more circumscribed role. An important feature of the language-game analogy is therefore that while rules may constitute a given game, playing a game involves more than mere adherence to its constitutive rules. Although it requires going beyond what Wittgenstein himself says, I want finally to highlight two further implications of this fact.

On the one hand, language-games should be thought of as varying in the degree to which they are rule-governed. Some activities, such as mathematics, involve well defined rules and highly articulate structure, others – such as aesthetics and ethics (*PU* §77) – do not. This does not imply that loosely regulated activities are deficient. Since, on the language-game conception, rules in language are linked with regularities in practice, we should expect just as much or as little regularity of structure in patterns of language use as there is homogeneity in the kinds of activity in which language is used.<sup>275</sup> At least two factors will influence this. The first is that a uniformity constraint is constitutive of some kinds of activity. Thus mathematics does not differ from, say, aesthetics simply in that mathematicians define terms precisely whereas aestheticians do not. Rather, mathematics is an intrinsically standardized activity, one in which results and agents must agree if what they are doing is in fact mathematics, whereas aesthetics does not constitutively require such uniformity (and

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<sup>273</sup> By contrast in a (mathematical) calculus the aim is precisely to eradicate such contextuality and nonregulation, so that each step is rationally defensible in the sense of being necessarily and sufficiently legitimized by adducing a rule.

<sup>274</sup> One reflection of this is that with the transition from *PG* to *PU* the games analogy is broadened beyond chess to games more generally (cf. *PU* §65).

<sup>275</sup> It ‘lies in the *essence* of language’ that if ‘the language-game, the activity [...] fixes the use of a word, then the concept of use is elastic with that of the activity’ (*LTSF* §340).

each might otherwise lose its point).<sup>276</sup> The second factor is how closely linked certain concepts are with the successful execution of corresponding kinds of action. Typically in highly specialized and/or technical activities the use of specific vocabulary will be essential to successful coordination of the relevant activity. To put it in terms used above, there will generally be a practical requirement for a sufficient degree of, and appropriate, linguistic differentiation. Thus how much free play there is in the use of words will generally be a function of the practical context. For this reason, I suggest, language-games are best thought of as *contexts of regulation* in a dual sense: both the extent to which rules are found and what those rules are – how much regulation and which – are features of the respective practice.<sup>277</sup>

On the other hand, the language-game analogy suggests, in contrast to the calculus model of language, a broader notion of competence. Of course, it is true that both bad players and good players, football players say, must adhere to the rules of the game in order to count as playing it at all. But what constitutes competence – what good players have, and poor players lack – is knowing what to do over and above the rules. (And, of course, being physically capable of doing it!) Thus a player's competence involves a general understanding of the game (e.g. knowing what it is to be playing well, to be lucky or unlucky), strategic awareness (how to react in various situations, which tactics might consolidate a strong position or help in a bad one), and dexterity or skill, which typically requires making good decisions and simply doing the right thing on the spur of the moment. This broader notion of competence is part of what made the union of language-games and the calculus model unstable. For, quite clearly, not only do these aspects of competence in playing a game go beyond the rules that define the game, but they cannot be characterized by hard and fast 'rules'.<sup>278</sup> Equally, though not answerable to rules, these aspects of competence are not a matter of chance. Alternatives to a given strategy or move can be entertained and found better or worse than what actually happened (luckily for

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<sup>276</sup> Incidentally, there is no implication that individual, or groups of, aestheticians cannot adopt highly precise terms. Wittgenstein's point (*PU* §77) is simply that definitions could not be given for the overall activity.

<sup>277</sup> At first glance, this might seem to conflict with Wittgenstein's own examples of language-games, all of which seem to be straightforwardly characterizable in terms of rules. However, Wittgenstein's qualification of his own language-games as 'clear and simple' (*PU* §130) is not redundant and clearly allows real language-games to be more complex.

<sup>278</sup> E.g. as regulative principles. Even where there are practical heuristics: there are no *rules*, though much informed opinion, which tells the England cricket captain who should bowl next, whether he should take the new ball, declare, enforce the follow on, send in a night watchman, etc.

sport commentary). I think these aspects of competence must be thought of as differing from ‘rules’ in two respects. First in that they are ad hoc, or contextual; but also in being subject to considerations of appropriateness – i.e. graduated and nonexclusive evaluation, rather than a sharp distinction between correct and incorrect. This might be labelled the ‘phronetic aspect’ of linguistic competence: the disposition, acquired by experience, to do the right thing, all things considered, in particular circumstances.<sup>279</sup>

Overall then the language-game analogy led the late Wittgenstein to a more modest and flexible view of linguistic rules than that suggested by the calculus model of language. The picture that emerges – involving vagueness, inexplicitness, contextuality and nonregulation – not only challenges the exhaustiveness of RCM in accounting for linguistic competence, but has specific consequences regarding what rules can tell us about the structure of linguistic practices and hence pragmatic sense. First, as the features of nonregulation and contextuality imply, rules can be expected to provide only an incomplete picture of language-games. It is (tautologically) true that irregular features are not characteristic aspects of language-games. Such features – corresponding to the phronetic aspect of linguistic competence – are hence ‘imponderable’ in that they elude a general, rules-based description of language-games.<sup>280</sup> And although I shall continue to describe Wittgenstein’s position as a view of rules, this openness to the phronetic aspect of linguistic competence can be thought of, so to speak, as its alter ego, or as the ground from which the figure of rules emerges. Second, the empirical, i.e. statistically distributed, form of linguistic rules in general will determine the sharpness or resolution of any rule-based description of a practice. In strictly regulated practices, such as mathematics, established rules would provide a detailed picture of the practice, whereas in less mechanical areas of life (e.g. how to lay out a garden) they would perhaps yield a caricature at best. These consequences can be summed up by saying that on Wittgenstein’s non-idealized picture rules correspond to general features of language-games or word use, *insofar* as these are actually found in the relevant practice. This implies – as reflected in the late Wittgenstein’s talk of the ‘physiognomy’ of meaning – that the reconfigured and

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s discussion of Prudence [*φρόνησις*] and the deliberative excellence it involves (Aristotle 1934, 351-7 [1142a25-1142b30]).

<sup>280</sup> Theirs is the domain of ‘unwägbare Evidenz’ (*PU II*, 575 f.).

constrained notion of rules serves to describe *characteristic features* of language-games, and hence language. In this sense, although it is a significant feature of Wittgenstein's overall picture that they are not ubiquitous in language, rules remain fundamentally important as the means by which established – and so presumably particularly important or useful – uses of words can be described.

### 3. Rule-following practices

To understand how Wittgenstein's views are able to meet the requirements on the notion of pragmatic sense, in particular how they relate to the idea of prepredicative understanding, it is necessary to consider what grasp speakers have of language-game structure, and hence of the rules inherent in such practices. Although the concept of rules was an abiding feature of Wittgenstein's views on language from the *Tractatus* on – where 'rules of logical syntax' were to underlie meaningful language and to be implicit in normal language (*Umgangssprache*; 3.334, 5.5563) – Wittgenstein initially, under the influence of the calculus model, apparently saw no need to explain how such rules are linked with the speakers' abilities in which they are supposedly manifested. This changed with the emergence of the language-game analogy, and already in the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein is troubled by the question of what following a rule consists of *in practice*, in particular by the (Kantian) difficulty of distinguishing behaviour involving rules from that merely conforming to them.<sup>281</sup> However, given the developments described in the preceding section, it is to the *PU* that one should look for a more mature view of speakers' grasp of rules.

There are two discussions of rules in *PU*. The first (§§81-88) – on which the preceding section concentrated – follows Wittgenstein's engagement with the issue of the general nature of language in §65 and can be seen as focusing on the relationship between rules and concepts. The second discussion (§§138-242) addresses the nature of rules. Wittgenstein launches this discussion by highlighting the difference between the meaning of a word, which one can supposedly grasp 'in a flash', and its temporally extended use, prompting the question of how the two are related. The general difficulty is that if a word is to be thought of as meaningful, it seems there should be something about it – its meaning – that determines how it is used and to which speakers' understanding corresponds. Whatever this something is, one might

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<sup>281</sup> *BIB* 13 (cf. already *PG* §43). The analogy is with Kant's (1983d, 33) distinction between acting out of duty and merely in accord with duty.

think, will explain what rules consist in. Discerning with any precision both the aims of this discussion and the conception of rules it relies on is complicated by the *PU*'s attempt to avoid expounding positive 'theses', in particular by its aphoristic, discontinuous and conversational mode of exposition. However, the placing of this discussion provides an important clue to its general aim. As it follows Wittgenstein's comments on the nature of philosophical problems and philosophical method of §§89-133, it is here, if anywhere, that one would expect the idea to apply that philosophical problems result from misunderstandings which are to be resolved by reminding us of the everyday uses of words. By implication, such views as Wittgenstein endorses are intended as reminders of an antecedently familiar notion of rules. As §235 puts it, his aim is to remind his reader of the 'physiognomy' of 'what in everyday life we call "following a rule"'. This is of some significance, since – in accord with his emphatic reliance on everyday language use – it underlines Wittgenstein's underlying commitment to a (so to speak) misunderstanding-free conception of linguistic rules.<sup>282</sup>

That conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the general contours at least of Wittgenstein's views, both negative and positive, can be quite easily discerned. On the negative side it is clear that in the course of his discussion Wittgenstein canvasses and rejects several proposals as to the kind of thing that might constitute meaning: the platonist image of a set of antecedently existing rails that guide us, occurrent mental states such as intuitions, or ideal 'mechanisms' somehow inherent in sign systems. This is to be expected, since the early parts of *PU* had already relied on Wittgenstein's preferred view of meaning as use in language-games, while nonetheless rejecting the idea of a 'general concept of meaning' (§§5, 43). So it would clearly be problematic if his discussion of rules were subsequently to reveal a philosophically 'superlative' type of meaning-constituting fact capable of founding a general concept of meaning (cf. §192). Yet at the same time, although his discussion is tortuous and oblique in form, positive aspects of Wittgenstein's view of rules are also intimated throughout: Understanding is likened to abilities and techniques (§150), such as reading (§§156 ff.), predicated on the basis of certain externally observable circumstances (§154); the basis of rules is acting without justification (§§211, 217). And against this background Wittgenstein seems to think that

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<sup>282</sup> Significant, that is, in supporting the above claims about the no-thesis thesis and the rule-scepticism Kripke imputes to Wittgenstein.

unclearities about the notion of rules are resolved simply by referring to a ‘constant use, a custom’ (§198), ‘*customs* (uses, institutions)’, ‘a technique’ (§199), or ‘a practice’ (§202). The difficulty is how this proposal is to be understood. Wittgenstein’s invocation of these notions – which he treats as broadly synonymous – is conspicuously elliptic and enigmatic at best.<sup>283</sup> But what does this talk of customs etc. involve? And how does it help to explain what rule-following involves?

To answer these questions it is germane to consider the conditions Wittgenstein thought it necessary for a conception of rules to meet. To begin with, such conditions would have two general features. First, within the framework of the language-game conception ‘rules’ and ‘rule-following’ are correlative concepts, since to determine what a rule is amounts to determining how an agent acts in adhering to it. In Wittgenstein’s words: ‘Following a rule is a human activity’, which can be described ‘only by describing in a different way what we do’ (*BGM* VI §29, VII §51). Second, descriptions of rule-following activity are subject to Wittgenstein’s general requirement that an “inner process” requires external criteria’ (*PU* §580). To some extent the significance of this thought as a methodological artifice is straightforward: From the *Blue Book* onwards Wittgenstein often suggested replacing internal images with external ones, in the conviction that any explanatory function an internal representation might fulfil must be equally comprehensible in terms of the use of an external representation, such that the description of mental abilities coincides with a description of the practice(s) in which they are manifested.<sup>284</sup> However, one further point is worth emphasizing. It is perhaps tempting to describe Wittgenstein’s insistence on external criteria as an insistence on the ‘public observability’ of criteria, or on ‘third-personal’ rather than ‘first personal’ criteria.<sup>285</sup> Though not strictly speaking incorrect, such glosses can be misleading and it is of some importance to underline that the point of Wittgenstein’s exteriorization method is to enforce explication of the supposed meaning-conferring role of inner representations. A consequence of this is that rules and criteria for rule-following are essentially impersonal: For the exteriorization move and the perspective it implies effectively

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<sup>283</sup> David Bloor understandably describes Wittgenstein’s commitments as ‘disturbingly minimal’, before less understandably – without any exegetic foundation – attributing to Wittgenstein a theory of institutions as ‘performative utterances, produced by the social collective’ (Bloor 1997, 28, 32).

<sup>284</sup> E.g. *BIB* 4, 13, 53; *PG* §§92, 99; cf. *PU* §§53, 301, 397.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. e.g. ‘Don’t now ask yourself “How is it with *me*?” – Ask: “What do I know about the other?”’ (*PU II* 539).

insist on the objectivity of criteria by eliminating *any* reference to a (first *or* third) personal perspective.<sup>286</sup>

In more specific terms, the basis for Wittgenstein's conception of rules is a (recognizable) regularity, since it is only against the background of a repeated pattern of behaviour that the question of whether a rule is being *followed* or not can arise (cf. *PU* §§207, 237). Accordingly Wittgenstein explicitly excludes describing one-off actions as rules: 'Is what we call "following a rule" something that only *one* person could do only *once* in his life? [...] It is not possible for one person to have followed a rule on only a single occasion'.<sup>287</sup> However, although necessary, the requirement that there be a background of regularity – the *regularity condition* – does not suffice in Wittgenstein's view to speak of rule-following. Rather, although 'acting according to a rule presupposes recognizing a uniformity [*Gleichmäßigkeit*]', Wittgenstein thought of regularity of action, or conformity to a rule, as merely a 'precursor to acting according to a rule' (*BGM* VI §§44, 43). What this lacks can be brought into focus by considering two examples from *BGM*. First:

there could be a caveman who produces regular [*regelmäßige*] sequences of signs for himself. He entertains himself, for example, by drawing -.-.-.-.- or -.-.-.-.-.- on the wall of the cave. But he does not follow the general expression of a rule. And we do not say that he acts regularly [sic.: *regelmäßig*] because we are able to form such an expression. (*BGM* VI §41)

This indicates that the feature distinguishing acting according to a rule from actions describable in terms of a regularity is to lie in the *agent's* (not an observer's) deployment of a 'general expression of the rule'. Wittgenstein contrasts this with activities in which a general expression is used such as teaching/learning:

If one of two chimpanzees scratched the figure |--| in the clay soil and another then the series |--|--| etc., then the first would not have provided a rule and the second not have followed it, no matter what happened in the souls of the two. However, if one observed, for example, the phenomenon of a kind of lesson, of demonstration and imitation of successful and unsuccessful attempts, of reward and punishment and suchlike; if the one so taught in the end lined up previously unseen figures as in the first example, then we would indeed say that one chimpanzee is writing down rules, the other following them. (*BGM* VI §42)

There are two differences between this case and the former that might seem decisive. First, the case of the chimpanzees differs from that of the caveman in that it involves

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<sup>286</sup> It follows, of course, that one applies the same criteria in attributing concepts to oneself, or in understanding one's own utterances, as one does to others. But this is because, as the Private Language Argumentation shows, there is no such thing as an essentially first-personal perspective on language, so that the distinction between first- and third-personal perspectives cannot do any work regarding the understanding of language.

<sup>287</sup> *PU* §199. This exclusion of a pure singularity from the concept of rules is often reiterated, e.g. at *BGM* VI §§21, 34; III §67.



social interaction. In this respect it might seem to support the claim that Wittgenstein's appeal to customs, institutions etc. was supposed to convey that rule-following is an essentially social practice. It seems to me that there is good reason to doubt this claim. For example, elsewhere Wittgenstein comments: 'When, then, do I say that I see the rule – or a rule – in this sequence? [...] [Is it] not also simply when I can continue it? No, I explain generally *to myself* or to another how it is to be continued' (*BGM* VI §27; italics added). This suggests that the social aspect is not essential: I explain to myself *or* to someone else. Moreover, this indifference is to be expected, given the impersonal nature of the 'external' criteria Wittgenstein insists on. After all, what difference *could* it make to the rule being followed whether I explain it to myself or to someone else? What counts as explication or justification is governed by the same considerations or criteria in both cases, i.e. no matter whose behaviour is under consideration. Admittedly, however, the issue of the way in which customs, institutions etc. are social and how this impacts on the notion of rule-following, in particular whether an isolated individual ('Robinson Crusoe') could engage in rule-following, is a much discussed and controversial aspect of Wittgenstein's views.<sup>288</sup> Nevertheless, I will not consider it further here, since for the present purposes it makes no difference whether customs and rule-following are assumed to be essentially social or not, as long as the second difference is not lost from view.

The second difference is simply that in the chimpanzees' case there is external evidence for the agent's deployment of a general expression of the rule. In this respect the contrast between the two situations is a paradigm case of Wittgenstein's use of (imaginary) language-games to elucidate what is involved in two different kinds of mental state – in this case between two kinds of cognitive ability. What matters here is the structure of sign-use practices as such, with the difference between rule-conformity and rule-following lying in the level of complexity exhibited in the two kinds of behaviour.<sup>289</sup> This additional complexity lies in the manifestation of corrective behaviour serving as evidence that the agent takes something involved in

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<sup>288</sup> On the one hand is the view that rule-following is an ability which, though usually exercised in shared social practices, is individually possessed (e.g. Baker/Hacker 1984, 1990; McGinn 1984; Shanker 1996). On the other hand are those who see a 'language-community' as playing some essential role – e.g. contributing proper normativity or rational stability – in the phenomenon of rule-following (e.g. Kripke 1982; Malcolm 1986, 1995; Wright 1980, cf. 220).

<sup>289</sup> That rule-following pertains to behaviourally manifested cognitive abilities is highlighted by Shanker 1996 and McGinn 1984, 32-40.

the practice to be a ‘general expression’ of the rule. In Wittgenstein’s view, as the second example shows, such complexity suffices to speak of rules being followed.

The problem with this example, as it stands, is that it is too demanding. While clearly sufficing to attribute such abilities, straightforward cases of overt use of a rule-expression and blatant corrective behaviour – as in the chimpanzees’ example – cannot be considered necessary for rule-following. Its advantage, however, is to provide a clear paradigm for the kind of cognitive ability rule-following involves: i.e. the ability to make comparisons or to offer justification, which in turn implies the ability to discern an aspect of sameness between two things and to make use of something – examples or a general expression – as a model for or standard of that sameness (cf. *PU* §§72-3). Nonetheless, more subtle behavioural indications might equally well suffice as evidence of an agent’s responsiveness to the correctness of what she is doing, and so of her ability to engage in normative behaviour.<sup>290</sup> This suggests that the condition met by Wittgenstein’s chimpanzees example should be formulated in a more forgiving form. Corresponding to the idea that the rule should be somehow involved in the process in question, the *agent’s grasp condition* – as I shall call it – should be seen as the general requirement that, whether or not anything is overtly deployed as a standard, rule-following requires that an agent be both aware of the regularity in question and attempting to maintain it. The difficulty is then to state, in general terms, what more must be added to a regularity in behaviour for an agent’s actions to provide evidence of the agent’s grasp condition’s being met.

Two features of the *PU*’s treatment of rules respond to this difficulty. The first occurs in the reflections Wittgenstein interposes between introducing (§143) and returning to (§185) the language-game of forming numerical series. To begin with the discussion of the concept of understanding (§§146-155) provides a general reminder that criteria for understanding lie in a sign’s pattern of use or application (§146), and that to the extent understanding is accompanied by criterially relevant characteristic processes, these are to lie in certain external circumstances rather than private mental events (§§152-155). The subsequent discussion, however, serves to make clear that rule-following encompasses complex and disparate phenomena characterized by family resemblance. Wittgenstein does not say this in as many words, i.e. advance it

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<sup>290</sup> Wittgenstein acknowledges several possibilities in *PU* §§54, 82. Hence the plausibility of Baker and Hacker’s emphasis that the notion of practice Wittgenstein relies on ‘is that of a normative regularity, not of a social practice’ (Baker/Hacker 1985, 151; cf. 169-179).

as a thesis. However, in discussing the example of reading (§§156-178) – a model of ‘being guided’ by linguistic signs – he combines the demand for observable contextual criteria with the insight that ‘reading’ stands not for *one* phenomenon, but a ‘family of cases’ to which ‘different criteria’ are applied ‘in different circumstances’.<sup>291</sup> The pertinence of these comments to the subsequent (from §185) further discussion of rules is established by the transition (§§179-184), in which the orientation towards (external) circumstances as well as the complexity of possible criteria is related back to the topic of rules (cf. §179). The implication is that, just as there no central defining feature of (language) games, there is no simple set of general conditions for meeting the agent’s grasp condition, and hence for rule-following.<sup>292</sup> Criteria for the concepts of ability and understanding are, Wittgenstein warns, ‘much more complicated than it might seem at first glance’ (*PU* §182). And precisely in everyday linguistic practice – i.e. Wittgenstein’s focus – one would expect to find more subtle and variegated manifestations of such abilities. So the difficulty of pinning down Wittgenstein’s conception of rules is due not only to his no-thesis thesis and stylistic difficulties, but also because in one sense the *PU* does not offer a general answer: Instead of attempting to develop a systematic theory of rules, it remains open to diverse criteria while offering fragmentary indications of the complex ‘physiognomy’ of the concept of rules ‘in everyday life’ (*PU* §235).

The significance of the second feature, viz. Wittgenstein’s appeal to customs etc., can be understood in the light of the first. For although Wittgenstein does not attempt to enumerate all conditions sufficing to meet the agent’s grasp condition – presumably thinking that no such enumeration is possible – this appeal does identify the *kinds* of phenomenon in which such a condition must be being met. For customs, institutions and (established) practices are phenomena in which there is transmission, or teaching, of intentionally upheld regularities – even if it is not obvious how to catalogue the ways in which this is done.<sup>293</sup> In other words, Wittgenstein’s talk of customs, institutions and practices is a place holder for a general answer, offered in lieu of a catalogue of specific conditions sufficient to attribute agents with a grasp of

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<sup>291</sup> *PU* §164. The family-resemblance character of reading is highlighted in §168. Wittgenstein had already made an equivalent claim about ‘understanding’ in *PG* §35.

<sup>292</sup> Cf. *PU* §65. – ‘Does that mean “following a rule” is indefinable? No. I can define it in countless ways’ (*BGM* VI §18).

<sup>293</sup> Insofar as they have any persistence and regularity over time language-games are institutions in this sense. – Incidentally, the idea that rules are upheld is reflected in the etymology of the German for ‘custom’: a ‘Gepflogenheit’ is that which is cared for or maintained (‘gepflegt’, from ‘pflegen’).

the rule. Its apparent vagueness notwithstanding, or rather precisely in virtue of this, such talk provides a way of dealing with the problem of the diversity and complexity of criteria for rule-following. So in this second sense the *PU* does provide a general answer to the question of what rule-following comprises. It is generic and vague, but such is the price of its being a general and complete answer.

Understood in this way, it might be wondered whether the appeal to customs etc. is able to fulfil the role, identified in §198, of distinguishing Wittgenstein's conception of rules from a mere 'causal connection', or explaining 'how it came about' that our actions accord with rules. For the appeal to customs etc., as just outlined, amounts to the *insistence* that the agent's grasp condition be met in some way, but says nothing substantial about how to do so. In this sense invoking the notion of customs is frustratingly empty, and the causal connection worry justified, insofar as Wittgenstein fails to state specifically what distinguishes (linguistic) rule-following from the mere rule-conformity exhibited by physical objects. Some light can be shed on this by recalling the phenomenon of inexplicitness and the distinction between providing 'samples of use' and 'stating the rule' as criteria of rule-following (*PG* §42) – which I shall subsequently refer to as *rule-exemplification* and *rule-stating* respectively. Using this distinction it might initially seem that – unless one can state the rule being followed – rule-exemplification is equivalent to the instantiation of rules, mere causal conformity, exhibited by inanimate natural objects. However, it is not difficult to appreciate that rule-exemplification can also provide the basis of corrective behaviour: 'I show him, he copies me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, disapproval, expectation, encouragement. I let him do as he likes, or hold him back etc.' (*PU* §208). Insofar as it can form the basis of such corrective behaviour, the rule-exemplification ability suffices to fulfil the agent's grasp condition – i.e. to exhibit sensitivity to both the regularity in question and its maintenance – and so gives a minimal sense to Wittgenstein's distinction of 'customs' etc. from merely 'causal connections'.<sup>294</sup> In fact it may be that this is precisely what Wittgenstein had in mind. For it is possible to discern here a characteristic feature of the conception of linguistic knowledge in the *PU*, according

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<sup>294</sup> Note that exemplifying use, or providing samples, is a spontaneous (e.g. potentially withholdable) feat, rather than being causally or 'mechanically' triggered.

to which the use of words is learned and explained primarily through examples, and often cannot be otherwise explained.<sup>295</sup>

The two general conditions Wittgenstein is looking to fulfil – the regularity condition and the agent’s grasp condition – can help in understanding the priority implicit in the phenomenon of inexplicitness, i.e. that rule-exemplification is more basic than rule-stating. These two conditions do not simply correspond to the two criteria for rule-following: the agent’s grasp condition is met by the ability to state the rule only in the simplest cases, and can also be met by the exemplification ability. Nonetheless, they allow the logical priority of rule-exemplification over rule-stating, and hence the possibility of the phenomenon of inexplicitness, to be understood as follows: Rule-exemplification suffices in principle to meet both the regularity condition and the agent’s grasp condition; which entails that the rule-stating ability is not necessary. Rule-exemplification is also necessary, as the regularity condition entails that a rule-follower be able to produce instances of the rule – ‘The application [*Anwendung*]’ of a rule ‘remains a criterion of understanding’ (*PU* §146); which entails that rule-stating alone is not sufficient. Thus whereas rule-exemplification is both necessary and sufficient for rule-following, rule-stating is neither necessary nor sufficient.

To conclude two points regarding the relationship between rule-following and language should be highlighted. First, as the above examples show, while emphasizing that ‘Following a rule is at the BASIS of our language-game’ (*BGM* VI §28), Wittgenstein does not think of rule-following as a specifically linguistic competence. His caveman and chimpanzees differ in the complexity of their behaviour, but in neither case could their behaviour be convincingly described as linguistic. In particular it should be noted that the rule-following ability on which Wittgenstein takes language-games to be founded does not essentially involve awareness of anything that might be described as propositions, nor any kind of conceptual or inferential properties taken to be linked with the notion of propositional content. Second, the idea of sensitivity to correctness where there is no overt use of a general rule-expression is (rightly) suggestive of subtlety and variety in the sufficiency conditions for rule-following. But it would be misleading to equate this with ‘implicit’ awareness of such conditions. One reason for this is that in his

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<sup>295</sup> Cf. *PU* §§69, 71, 75, 208.

examples Wittgenstein's willingness to attribute rule-awareness invariably turns on manifest, or at least manifestable, behaviour. In this respect his view of criteria centres on explicit behaviour alone; implicit features, if anything, are simply those that would be explicit in appropriate circumstances – as *PU* §126 puts it, 'what might be hidden does not interest us'. On this view, for example, nonlinguistic behaviour should not be thought of as 'implicit' knowledge of the propositions that would describe it. Rather, linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviours are different forms of explicitness.<sup>296</sup> Similarly, the distinction between rule-exemplification and rule-stating should not be thought of as the distinction between implicit and explicit awareness of the rule, but as two different kinds of manifestable (explicit) awareness of it.

#### **4. Pragmatic sense**

In chapter I the notion of pragmatic sense was introduced as the sense signs have due to the respective roles they play as instruments in established practices. This chapter, in particular the first two sections, have highlighted two major aspects of Wittgenstein's 'praxeological' conception of language that allow it to be understood as explicating what pragmatic sense consists of. First is the way that linguistic articulation is intrinsically linked with practice in general, reflected in the view of language-games as the context of conceptual articulation and the idea of forms of life as functionally interconnected aggregates of language-games. The somewhat mechanistic vision hinted at by such functional interrelations is relaxed and made more flexible, second, by the reconfigured and constrained conception of rules that emerges with the maturing language-game analogy. As opposed to the calculus model's vision of sharply defined, omnipresent rules, the kind of rules inherent in language-games are in general to be thought of as both empirically contoured, i.e. defined in terms of more or less sharply delimited normal conditions, and as varying in the extent to which they constitute language-games. Nevertheless, to the extent that language-games do have a determinate and enduring structure, this ideal-free conception of rules provides the means for characterizing what participation in them requires, and hence what pragmatic sense consists in. The aim of this section is to show how these

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<sup>296</sup> In particular, being committed to the truth of or belief in certain contents, say by one's nonlinguistic actions, should be distinguished from 'implicit knowledge' of those contents. After all, it is a lot clearer what explicit nonlinguistic awareness is than what implicit linguistic awareness is.

Wittgensteinian ideas meet the requirements previously identified on the notion of pragmatic sense. It begins by indicating how Wittgenstein's views are compatible with a phenomenological approach, and then draws on the preceding discussions to show how rule-based pragmatic sense can be considered to be prepredicative.

(i) *A 'phenomenological' view*: An obvious advantage of Wittgenstein's approach to language, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's, is its focus on everyday experience of language. However, it is the two features just referred to – the internal link between concepts and practice, and his late conception of rules – that make Wittgenstein's views particularly suited to phenomenologically accurate description of language. In contrast to formal, particularly calculus-based, conceptions of language, language-games are clearly recognizable as schematizations of actual linguistic practice. As such they picture language as processual in character, rather than as some kind of abstract structure, so that Wittgenstein can plausibly, trivially even, claim to be talking about language as a 'spatial and temporal phenomenon', rather than 'some non-spatial and non-temporal non-entity'.<sup>297</sup> But above all the idea of language-games reflects the fundamental importance of practice, i.e. human action, in shaping language. The modest view of rules identified above reflects the fact that actual language use can, without deficiency, be more or less sharply delimited and manifest greater or lesser degrees of regulation. Rather than relying on idealized or artificial standards of precision, this conception of rules and their role exhibits the flexibility required to describe the characteristic traits of language-games. So it is by both centring on the right kind of thing (i.e. language-games) to invite comparison with linguistic practices, and doing so in the right way, that makes Wittgenstein's praxeological conception of language particularly attuned to accurate description of real linguistic phenomena.

This conception of language also exhibits several features previously identified as generally characterizing a phenomenological conception of language. For example, the notion of language-games not only, as just noted, conceives of language as a process rather than some kind of stasis, but is specifically intended to block the tendency to think of language as a system of forms. As with Heidegger, this 'antiformalism' is linked with a nonreductive approach to semantics, evidenced in

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<sup>297</sup> *PU* §108 – 'non-entity' here translates 'Unding' (literally 'non-thing'), which in German conveys absurdity.

Wittgenstein's critique of simple referring and his dictum 'everything that describes a language-game belongs to logic' (*ÜG* §56). In addition, while Wittgenstein had earlier conceived of language, so to speak, as a world-independent ('autonomous') medium of meaning constitution, his later thinking was led by the maturing language-game analogy to reflect the embedment of language in human practice and its empirical surroundings (the empiricization of rules), and so to a view of language as language-in-the-world.

One clarification is perhaps requisite at this point: In claiming that Wittgenstein's conception of language meets the key desideratum for a phenomenological approach to language – i.e. accurately describing linguistic phenomena – I do not mean to imply that he intended such an approach. The reason for highlighting this is that there have been various attempts to interpret Wittgenstein as a 'phenomenological' philosopher.<sup>298</sup> This idea can be motivated in several ways. The starting point is Wittgenstein's apparently phenomenological emphasis on description rather than explanation (*PU* §109; cf. §§124, 496). In addition, his focus on language as a 'spatial and temporal phenomenon' and insistence on the need to understand what is already manifest in linguistic phenomena – what 'already lies open before our eyes' (*PU* §126; cf. §89) – might give the impression that Wittgenstein was himself committed to the aim of accurately describing phenomena. An apparently plausible basis for developing interpretations of this kind is the fact that following his return to Cambridge in 1929 Wittgenstein himself was for a time interested in the development of what he called a 'phenomenology'.<sup>299</sup> But such interpretations have also been developed on the basis of perceived parallels between Wittgenstein's thinking and the phenomenological movement – typically relying on various of Husserl's claims about phenomenological method.<sup>300</sup>

There are good grounds for doubting that Wittgenstein himself was a 'phenomenological' philosopher in any significant sense. To begin with, his notebooks from around 1929 make clear that his interest was in describing immediate

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<sup>298</sup> See, for example, Munson 1962, Spiegelberg 1981, Gier 1981, Guest 1991. Developing the views of Hintikka/Hintikka (1986, cf. in particular 148-154), Byong-Chul (1998) offers an extensive and more philosophically focused interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a form of phenomenology. For a dissenting voice, see Reeder 1989.

<sup>299</sup> The best known traces of this are found in the manuscripts known as *Philosophical Remarks* (1929-30) and the *Big Typescript* (1933). For anecdotal evidence of Wittgenstein's description of his work as 'phenomenology' see Rhees 1981, 131 and Spiegelberg 1981, 214.

<sup>300</sup> Such parallels are suggested by Guest (1991), and with some caution by Spiegelberg (1981, 212, 215 f.), but most extensively – and most speculatively – by Gier (1981, cf. 91-134).



sense data (i.e. phenomenalism) and that he himself soon rejected this ‘phenomenological’ project as incoherent.<sup>301</sup> Further, in the absence of explicit references, or any other evidence of influence, there is no reason to suppose that perceived parallels between Wittgenstein’s methods and, say, Husserl’s go beyond the kind of similarities one would expect to find between any two philosophers. More acutely, Wittgenstein explicitly and quite unequivocally claims in *PU* §383 to be ‘analysing not a phenomenon (e.g. thinking), but a concept (e.g. that of thinking), and so the application of a word’. Although the tenability of this distinction might be challenged – isn’t the investigation of language simultaneously an investigation of phenomena, as Austin (1979, 182) would later claim? – Wittgenstein’s self-understanding is clear: the object of his descriptive study is language, not phenomena as such.

For my purposes, however, there is no need to settle whether Wittgenstein himself was a ‘phenomenologist’. The suggestion here, to reiterate, is not that his approach was phenomenological, but merely that his conception of language is compatible with such an approach. That is, insofar as it is recognizably suited to describing actual linguistic processes, it can be treated *as though* it were guided by the idea of accountability to phenomena. In fact this is not altogether surprising and might be thought of as an indirect commitment arising from Wittgenstein’s method of illuminating comparison: if such comparisons are to yield clarification, the underlying conception of language must cohere recognizably with actual linguistic phenomena. Accordingly, once convinced of the calculus model’s breakdown, Wittgenstein was naturally led to focus on everyday experience of language in developing the language-game conception. More significantly perhaps, Wittgenstein’s claim not to be analyzing phenomena as such should be relativized, given the special status of language in his thinking: Even if it is assumed that in focusing on language he does not generally analyze phenomena, this does not prevent Wittgenstein having a phenomenological conception *of language*. For what loss could there be in reducing linguistic phenomena to linguistic phenomena?

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<sup>301</sup> See in particular manuscripts 105 (esp. 114, 116) from 1929-30 and 113 (esp. 245 f.) of 1931-2, which are now widely available in the Vienna Edition (*Wiener* vol. 1, 193; vol. 5, 133). For a sound and informative reconstruction of ‘Wittgenstein’s phenomenology’ see Kienzler 1997, 105-142.

(ii) *Pragmatic sense as prepredicative*: To show that the rule-structure inherent in language-games admits of being grasped prepredicatively, I now want to set out how Wittgenstein's views meet the three requirements previously identified for prepredicative factors. It is relatively straightforward to see the late Wittgenstein as focusing on *subpropositional* factors. To begin with, there are several indications that he – just as Heidegger – does not see propositional meaning as having explanatory primacy: much of *PU*'s discussion focuses directly on words rather than sentences; §§19-20 and §136 also hint that pragmatic rather than syntactic criteria can individuate sentences, so that propositions cannot be taken to have a general form – which Wittgenstein thought entailed commitment to the calculus model of language.<sup>302</sup> Wittgenstein's focus on subpropositional factors becomes clearer by considering his view of the processes that determine word use. First, as previously pointed out, the rule-following abilities he concentrates on can also be applied to nonlinguistic behaviours, and are in no way specifically tied to the use of expressions in sentential contexts or the idea of propositional content. However, above all it is implicit in the language-game model (section 1 above) that the meaning of terms is determined directly by practical requirements – the need to have a word for this object, that process, or whatever – and not mediated by participation in propositional units.

Somewhat more involved is understanding how pragmatic sense is supposed to be *subinferential* in the dual sense previously identified, which requires that pragmatic sense – i.e. the rules corresponding to practice-inherent structure – can be grasped without awareness of inferential properties, while at the same time functioning as the basis of inferential properties. Given the traditional link between rule-following and predication as characteristics of the Understanding, the difficulty is how praxeological rules can play a foundational (rather than a directly constitutive) role in relation to predicative awareness. To show how this subinferential function can be accommodated on Wittgenstein's overall picture of how language works, it will be helpful first to consider his view of the finiteness of justification. Wittgenstein expresses this view in a number of ways, including the well-known metaphor of the bending spade in §217 and several comments suggesting resignative passivity: 'What has to be accepted, the given [...] are *forms of life*', 'the everyday language-game is

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. *PU* §65. – *PG* §80 had claimed that 'A general propositional form determines the proposition as a term in a calculus'.

to be accepted', 'Our mistake is to search for an explanation where we should view the facts as "primal phenomena". That is, where we should say: *this language-game is played*'.<sup>303</sup> The underlying thought – in itself hardly original – is that if justification did not somehow come to an end an infinite regress would result, implying that there is no such thing as justification (cf. *PU* §485). The distinctive feature of Wittgenstein's position is that he sees justification as coming to an end not in evident truths, some special way of seeing (intuiting), or even in 'unjustified assumptions', but in an 'unjustified way of acting'.<sup>304</sup> Indeed the existence of such basic practices, Wittgenstein further suggests, simply has to be accepted as something 'beyond justified and unjustified; i.e. so to speak, as something animal' (*ÜG* §359; cf. §559).

Such epigrammatic formulations are potentially misleading: In what sense are language-games, or forms of life, to be 'accepted' as 'given'? Wittgenstein certainly does not think that the language-games constituting a language cannot change or evolve (*PU* §23). Nor does he think that no reasons can be given for acting in existing ways. Rather, in claiming that language use is founded in ways of acting that are themselves unjustified his thought is that at some stage justification loses its force (*ÜG* §307). The relevant sense of 'acceptance' is best understood in the perspective of 'conceptual investigations' of the kind Wittgenstein was interested in conducting, i.e. in describing the structural relationships between concepts.<sup>305</sup> For here there is a sense in which established language-games do have to be 'accepted' as 'given', namely as the object of description; and insofar as concepts are viewed as standing in rationally motivated relationships, this mode of enquiry points towards something that must be considered unjustified. Moreover because, on Wittgenstein's approach, concepts are articulated in language-games, they must be grounded in forms of action (rather than, say, basic logical forms) that are unjustified.

Rather than either defending or exploring the implications of Wittgenstein's claims for a general theory of rationality, I want here simply to highlight two

<sup>303</sup> *PU* II, 572 (cf. *BPP* I §630), 529; *PU* §654 – where Wittgenstein's term 'Urphänomene' is almost certainly an allusion to Goethe (e.g. Goethe 1996, vol. 12, 366-7).

<sup>304</sup> *ÜG* §§204, 110, cf. §166: 'The difficulty is to see [*einsehen*] the groundlessness of our beliefs'. (Similarly *PU* §§211, 212, 217.)

<sup>305</sup> Cf. *BPP* I §949, where Wittgenstein likens his conceptual investigations to Goethe's morphology. There are several such indications of Goethe's influence on Wittgenstein (cf. Schulte 1984, Monk 1990, 509-512, 303-304), which, incidentally, is also a plausible source of Wittgenstein's apparently phenomenological emphasis on description over explanation (Goethe 1996, vol. 13, 123; cf. vol. 12, 432, which *BPP* I §889 cites).

features.<sup>306</sup> First it is implicit in the idea of language-games which *cannot* be justified – which are ‘beyond justified and unjustified’ – that justification *does not*, on principle, play any role in such games. Thus Wittgenstein relies on a distinction between prejustificatory and justificatory language-games, i.e. between language-games that do not (cannot) involve justification and language-games that do (or at least might) involve justification. Second, employing this distinction, his claim is that justificatory language-games presuppose, or are based on, prejustificatory language-games.

But how is the ability to participate in prejustificatory language-games, in particular, to be understood? To answer this, it is important to bear in mind that Wittgenstein is concerned with ‘justification’ in the specific sense of explicating the conceptual or sense structure inherent in practices. In this respect ‘justification’ is analogous to other practices such as description, explanation or teaching that involve rule-stating so as to elucidate the structure of some underlying practice (that being described, explained or learnt). With this in mind, the relationship between rule-stating and rule-exemplification in the phenomenon of inexplicitness provides a model for understanding prejustificatory practices. While this phenomenon reflects the (logical) priority of rule-exemplification over rule-stating, it is clear that there is some link between these two abilities. For rule-stating is implicitly referred to – and hence founded in – an underlying pattern (of rule-exemplifications) in the sense that, if there were no regularity, it could not count as stating a rule. This suggests that prejustificatory language-games should be thought of as language-games in which it is possible to participate on the basis of rule-exemplification alone (which, to recall, can meet Wittgenstein’s two conditions for rule-following). Accordingly, Wittgenstein’s idea that justification is finite can be interpreted as the claim that justificatory language-games, which involve rule-stating, presuppose prejustificatory language-games, for participation in which rule-exemplification abilities suffice.<sup>307</sup>

This conclusion can be recast in terms of the prepredicative-predicative distinction. Predicative awareness, according to Heidegger’s distinction, is awareness

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<sup>306</sup> Wittgenstein sometimes (e.g. *ÜG* §§253, 262, 612) hints at the – implausible – view advocated, for example, by Kuhn (1970) and Rorty (1979, 315 ff.; 1989, 8 f.) that rationality is system-internal, so that changes between systems (or forms of life) are governed by nonrational procedures.

<sup>307</sup> The builders language-game of *PU* §2 is an example of a routine in which no rule-stating is involved. It is interesting to note that although Wittgenstein thinks of the builders as having knowledge which they cannot express (*ÜG* §396), he elsewhere denies that ‘concepts’ are involved in this game (*BGM* VII §71).

of expressions' properties, understood to be purpose-independent attributes underlying their inferential behaviour. In relation to Wittgenstein's picture, a grasp of such properties must be thought of in terms of the ability to involve them in justificatory practices, which requires the ability to characterize in some general way, to state rather than simply to exemplify, the rule for the use of an expression. And since, conversely, stating a rule is to present it in a form allowing its involvement in justification, rule-stating corresponds to the ability to participate in justificatory language-games and is hence a predicative ability. By contrast, in lacking the feature that enables such participation rule-exemplification must be understood as a prepredicative ability. Moreover, this matches up with Heidegger's view of purposive awareness, since grasping what words are for and so in which practical circumstances to use them clearly corresponds to the ability to exemplify their use. The above conclusion can therefore be restated by saying that justificatory language-games, and hence predicative awareness, should always be thought of as founded in language-games based on the prepredicative ability of rule-exemplification.

This has three implications of importance here. The first is to make clear that practice-inherent rules can be grasped both prepredicatively and predicatively, as required to function subinferentially: rule-stating and justificatory language-games stand to rule-exemplification and prejustificatory language-games as the predicative does to the prepredicative in Heidegger's terminology. The second implication, corresponding to the Heideggerian possibility of prepredicative language use, is that not all language-games, and hence not all linguistic competence, can be (let alone need be) understood in terms of justificatory or predicative activity. Indeed, as the phenomenon of inexplicitness attests, the supposition must be that the ability simply to exemplify appropriate use of expressions – i.e. without being able to elucidate their use – would suffice to participate in many (though of course not all) established language-games. Third, the founding of justificatory in prejustificatory, or predicative in prepredicative, language-games can be understood as a general point about the functional stratification of language-games (end of section 1 above). The point is not so much, though allowing this possibility, that justification-free language-games might exist empirically without ever being developed into more sophisticated practices involving justification. Rather it should be taken as an analysis of the praxeological structure of linguistic competence, such that justificatory practices can always be understood as implicitly referred to some underlying form of

prepredicative language-game. This dependence can be pictured in phenomenal terms such that any form of practice involving justification can be thought of as being based on corresponding, but simpler, justification-free forms of practice – e.g. in routine performances of the rule in question.

At this point it is instructive to contrast this Wittgensteinian view briefly with a proposal made by Robert Brandom in *Making it Explicit*. Describing himself as an ‘anti-intellectualist about norms’ and an ‘antiformalist about logic’ (1994, 135), in a manner reminiscent of Heidegger, Brandom acknowledges the need to found semantics in a ‘pragmatics’, i.e. to cash out semantic and logical vocabulary in terms of practices, or what we do. The ‘critical criterion of adequacy’ he suggests for a foundational pragmatics is ‘that the core linguistic practices it specifies be *sufficient* to confer propositional and other conceptual contents on the expressions, performances, and deontic statuses that play appropriate roles in those practices’ (Brandom 1994, 159). Brandom makes a generic proposal as to the kind of practice fulfilling this task for which two ideas are central. The first, adopted from Wilfrid Sellars, is to consider language as a ‘game of giving and asking for reasons’. The second, adopted from David Lewis, is to model the way participants keep track of this game as a form of ‘scorekeeping’. In broad outline Brandom’s approach is as follows: The fundamental kind of move made in such games is the act of asserting some proposition. In making an assertion one becomes committed to some content, both that expressed and that inferentially linked with this, and undertakes a responsibility, if challenged, to show that one is rationally entitled to make the relevant commitment. The basis of scorekeeping activities are what Brandom calls ‘deontic statuses’: commitment to propositions, the exclusion of propositions on grounds of consistency, along with the entitlement to make the claims one is making. ‘Talking and thinking’, Brandom (1994, 183) concisely assures us, ‘is keeping score in this sort of game’.

From the perspective developed here several comments on Brandom’s proposal are due. First, it seems to me that in presenting ‘scorekeeping’ as some kind of pervasive universal language-game it fails the test of phenomenological adequacy. On the one hand, it seems implausible to suggest that we are usually aware of keeping tabs on other people’s propositional commitments (scorekeeping). On the other hand, I suggest, this is not the kind of thing we could do without being aware of it. In addition, the scorekeeping model’s assimilation of all language use to (tacit?) ‘giving and asking for reasons’ seems to disregard the fact that not all linguistic practices

involve reason-giving. Admittedly, this kind of objection might be thought inconclusive, as there is clearly scope for disagreement about what counts as mere description and what counts as (philosophical) interpretation of lived experience.<sup>308</sup>

In fact Brandom himself makes some allowance for the unphenomenological character of his foundational pragmatics. At one point he describes the notion of commitment on which his idea of deontic statuses and hence scorekeeping depends as ‘an artificial, scorekeeping device’, adding that language-games also have a ‘material aspect’ (Brandom 1994, 183). To understand this material aspect adequately would require describing phenomenologically plausible language-games, the characteristics and structure of activities or practices in which ‘scorekeeping’ actually takes place. Accordingly, deontic statuses and the sense of accountability involved – what they are commitments to do, what it is to be held rationally accountable, and what counts as meeting or failing to meet justificatory commitments – are commitments that can be understood in terms of language-games. It seems to me that the very intelligibility of the notion of scorekeeping rests on this possibility of being cashed out in material or phenomenal terms. Indeed the whole point of phenomenological (say Heidegger’s) antiformalism is that, rather than being thought of as basic, propositional content or commitments must be understood in terms of their embedding in underlying phenomena. For Brandom, however, propositional content and commitments remain fundamental – as clearly reflected in the criterion of adequacy he identifies and his emphasis on the supposed ‘*pragmatic priority of the propositional*’ (Brandom 1994, 79). As a result, despite recognizing the important desideratum of relating formal semantics to linguistic practice, it must be doubted that Brandom’s position is really an ‘antiformalist’ one. Rather than considering the ‘material aspect’ of such phenomena, the scorekeeping model is a rational reconstruction which projects onto linguistic phenomena precisely the features required for these to cohere with semantics.<sup>309</sup> In this sense it is not a phenomenological antidote to formalism, but simply a further ramification of a formalist approach. Nonetheless, even if its intelligibility is not thought to be threatened, the fact that ‘scorekeeping’ could be understood in terms of its material aspect makes it an unnecessary artifice. Why not

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<sup>308</sup> See page 9 f. above. – Note, however, that on the Wittgensteinian view suggested here that not all language-games involve reason-giving is not simply how it seems, but reflects the fact that, since justification is finite and founded in prejustificatory practices, not all linguistic practice *can* be construed in terms of reason-giving.

<sup>309</sup> In this respect it seems to me that Brandom’s (1994, 83) motto ‘semantics must answer to pragmatics’ misrepresents his own priorities.

think of the foundation of semantics directly in praxeological terms – as the foundation of justificatory in prejustificatory language-games – in the way sketched here?

Finally, to appreciate how pragmatic sense *heterologously* founds predicative awareness, it is useful to think of the prepredicative ability to exemplify appropriate use of linguistic expressions as a linguistic form of knowing-how.<sup>310</sup> As a characterization of intelligent or skilled behaviour, Ryle's classic notion of 'knowing-how' was intended to contrast with both the mere regularity of habits and the propositional competence of 'knowing-that'. Without wanting to be committed to the further details of Ryle's discussion, the notion of pragmatic sense suggested here can be seen to exhibit two features Ryle saw as distinguishing knowing-how from knowing-that.<sup>311</sup> First, whereas knowing-that is something for which reasons can be required, reasons are not involved in knowing-how (Ryle 1949, 28). As has been seen, this is paralleled both in Wittgenstein's view (inexplicitness) that picking up the use of expressions does not require familiarity with explicit expressions of rules, and in his idea of prejustificatory language-games. Second, whereas knowing-that is bivalent (one either does or does not know *p*), knowing-how comes by degree, as something one does more or less well (Ryle 1949, 59). The praxeological view of linguistic competence presented here exhibits such graduation in two ways. To begin with, insofar as rules are empirical in form, there can varying degrees of conformity or nonconformity with normal conditions (which themselves can be more or less sharply delimited). In addition, some aspects of the broader conception of competence suggested by the language-game analogy are governed by considerations of appropriateness, admitting different kinds and degrees of response, rather than the polarity of 'right' and 'wrong'.<sup>312</sup> These two features indicate that purposive awareness – including that of language – has a functional topology that is distinct

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<sup>310</sup> Most of Ryle's examples of knowing-how are nonlinguistic activities, such that 'doing is an overt muscular affair' and there is a clear sense in which 'Efficient practice precedes the theory of it' (Ryle 1949, 32, 30). However, it is implicit in the (Heideggerian/Wittgensteinian) view developed here that the distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that – corresponding to that between prepredicative and predicative, or purposive and propositional awareness – falls within language use.

<sup>311</sup> For detailed discussion of problems concerning Ryle's apparent identification of knowing-how with abilities, his regress-based arguments in favour of the distinction, and its relevance to his argument against the 'intellectualist legend', see Stanley/Williamson 2001 and Snowdon 2003.

<sup>312</sup> Though not impossible, it is plausible to think of use as governed by bivalent correctness conditions only in the limiting case of strictly regulated language-games such as mathematics.



from, but the basis of propositional content, thus giving substance to the claim that predicative awareness has a heterologous foundation in pragmatic sense.

## **5. Completing the Heideggerian framework**

The importance of this Wittgensteinian explication of pragmatic sense can be made clearer by considering how it relates to the Heideggerian framework and the notion of presentational sense set out in the previous chapters. To begin with, the view of pragmatic sense presented here makes light work of the deficiencies highlighted with Merleau-Ponty's position. As then hinted, explicating the way linguistic regularities are linked with practice not only gives a convincing picture of the background of established 'direct' language use, but clearly brings out the kind of pragmatic, practical or vital constraints that necessarily check the unfolding of the expressive potential of language. That is, it identifies a counterbalance to expressive openness which yields (in Ricoeur's terms) a polysemy that is regulated. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's critique of the ideal of determinacy and his subsequently reconfigured notion of rules make clear how direct sense can be understood without eccentric metaphysical assumptions about nonperspectival presentations of intentional objects which Merleau-Ponty apparently thought 'direct' sense implies.

The attempt to conceive of language without recourse to an ideal of full, nontemporal determinacy is an important convergence between Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's views. As seen in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty's focus on finite embodied agency led him to reject any such ideal of final determinacy and to see all meaning, including linguistic meaning, as characterized by constitutively open horizons formed in ongoing processes. Wittgenstein arrived at a corresponding conclusion, becoming convinced that the commitment to full determinacy implicit in his earlier calculus model of language leads to incoherence. But while Merleau-Ponty's response was to emphasize the creative openness of language, Wittgenstein's, as this chapter has attempted to show, was to provide an alternative view – the pragmatization of determinacy – of what it is for concepts to be determinate. Common to both, nonetheless, is the attempt to conceive of language without a teleological notion of determinacy, i.e. supposed exactness or objective properties towards which intentionality should tend.

As one might expect, given the way I have presented them within the Heideggerian framework, there is not just convergence, but also complementarity

between Wittgenstein's praxeological conception of language and Merleau-Ponty's view of indirect linguistic expression. To begin with, they each concentrate on a different aspect of linguistic signs' functioning. From one point of view, as just mentioned, Wittgenstein's focus on the pragmatic aspect of language is an important counterbalance to the account of creative and expressive aspects of language use on which Merleau-Ponty's view concentrates. But at the same time Wittgenstein's somewhat dismissive approach to the misleading 'images' bound up in linguistic forms is not altogether satisfactory.<sup>313</sup> For this seems to accept that linguistic form does have some representational – or, as I would prefer to say, presentational – significance, while treating the proper basis of linguistic meaning as praxeological. But if linguistic forms can be misleading, they can presumably also assume a positive role in mediating understanding, leading to the question of how misleading and illuminating uses of linguistic form are distinguished from one another. In this respect the notion of presentational sense developed above, on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's views, can be seen as complementing Wittgenstein's foundational pragmatism by setting out how fine (sublexical) differences can be interpreted as meaningful.<sup>314</sup>

Another aspect of complementarity concerns the level of linguistic articulation on which Merleau-Ponty's and Wittgenstein's respective conceptions of language concentrate. Whereas Merleau-Ponty's notion of indirect sense is based on the differential operation of sublexical elements, the language-game approach operates at the level of words. In Saussurean terms, Wittgenstein thus deals with the level of constituted signs, of distinct rather than differential features. An important consequence of this complementary focus is that it allows one to see how the notion of reference can be accommodated within the Heideggerian framework. For a notable feature of the language-game conception is that it provides an 'account of' reference that effectively undermines the idea of reference as a basic semantic notion. First, as seen in section 1 above, Wittgenstein's critique of pure referential relations, of simple referring or simple referents, leads to the idea of articulate reference, according to which what it is to be a referent is a function of the way an entity is referred to in the

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<sup>313</sup> Cf. *PU* §§94, 104, 110-114.

<sup>314</sup> Some of Wittgenstein's later reflections point in this direction. For example, choosing between terms, he says, is like choosing 'between similar, but not identical pictures', as if 'according to fine differences in their smell'; words can have a 'familiar face', exhibit 'fine aesthetic difference[s]', leading to the 'feeling that it has absorbed its meaning' (*PU* §139[a]; *PU II* 560 f.). But these comments remain characteristically elliptic and metaphorical, and Wittgenstein makes no attempt to develop a positive account of the role of linguistic form.

language-game context. Furthermore, what it is to be a referent must be understood as corresponding to the kind of rules found in language-games, and hence – without ideal determinacy – as subject to the pragmatization of determinacy discussed in section 2. Hence the upshot of Wittgenstein's approach is that how and how sharply something is picked out as 'a referent' is governed by the language-game in question.<sup>315</sup>

In emphasizing the foundational role of practice and in its nonreductive approach to semantic questions Wittgenstein's approach is also clearly similar in spirit to Heidegger's. Both conceive of language in a purposive perspective, such that Wittgensteinian language-games comprise the context of Heidegger's Equipmental relations, insofar as the latter involve the use of linguistic signs. Similarly, both treat the purposive optic as the context of the articulation or formation of linguistic sense, with the intrinsic link Wittgenstein identifies between the use of signs and forms of practice corresponding to Heidegger's view that the significance of words results from circumspective Setting-out. Given these similarities, what Wittgenstein's praxeological conception of language adds to the Heideggerian framework are richer, phenomenologically sensitive means for envisaging and describing contexts of purposive awareness through their varying degrees of organization. That is, whereas Heidegger's talk of what Equipment 'is for' (its 'Wozu') or Dasein-relative aims (the 'Worum-willen') treats purposive notions as descriptively basic, Wittgenstein's notion of practice-inherent rules provides a means for structurally characterizing purposive understanding. Such rules can be seen as both the structure of practices, i.e. of purposive contexts, themselves and the role words play in language-games. In the latter respect, the notion of rules also provides the means to understand the specific level of instrumentality built into Heidegger's conception of linguistic signs. For, despite the multitude of such roles, what a sign does in a particular language-game, and hence what it is for signs to be instruments in the sense of having specific functions, can generally be thought of in terms of praxeological rules.

Finally, Wittgenstein's views also complement those of Heidegger by elucidating the idea the latter describes as a 'modification' of the 'hermeneutic as' into the 'apophantic as', the move from Handiness to Thingness. While Heidegger

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<sup>315</sup> One might think this an unacceptably antirealist claim, and believe the extension, say, of 'natural kind' terms such as 'gold' to be determined in a language-game transcendent manner. But the stipulation that reference is to be determined by physical properties, characteristic of scientific practices, is itself a language-game-relative determination.

provides some idea of what kind of move this 'modification' involves – i.e. from purposive to objective, properties-based individuation of entities – the processes or phenomena in which this transition is effected remain obscure. Wittgenstein's views suggest, at least in outline, how this 'as-modification' can be cashed out in phenomenal terms. At a general methodological level he would insist on the need for external criteria, and on explicating the difference between prepredicative and predicative abilities in terms of corresponding types of language-game. More specifically, this difference, and with it Heidegger's as-modification, can be understood in terms of the distinction between prejustificatory and justificatory language-games discussed above. Thus on the one hand (hermeneutic-as) are simple, ungrounded language-games in which doing things linguistically requires only rule-exemplification. On the other hand (apophantic-as) are more complex, founded language-games in which doing things linguistically involves rule-stating, justification, explanation etc.

At this point it is possible to review the overall view of language that results from using the positions of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein to fill out the Heideggerian framework. In general terms, it was suggested, a phenomenological conception of language should conceive of language not as having an inside-outside topology, but as embedded in or distributed over other aspects of the world, as well as adopting an antireductionist and antiformalist attitude towards linguistic phenomena, and treating language as a process rather than some static structure. These general features were summed up in the claim that language should be understood as language-in-the-world. Within this framework the intervening chapters have shown how Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty furnish a more complete picture of what language is embedded in. Whereas the embedding in human practices alluded to in Heidegger's talk of Equipment can be understood more fully using Wittgenstein's language-game analogy, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to two further aspects of the embedding of language: first the fact that language use is, as 'lived sense', a phenomenon of embodied agency, second that language is shaped by the 'expressive system' of lexical and sublexical differentiation. The resultant overall picture thus sees languages as embedded in human practice, in embodiment, and in their own semiotic horizon.

A consequence of this, reflected in Heidegger's antireductionism and antiformalism, is that language should not be conceived of one-sidedly in terms of 'representational content'. To be sure, one of the inputs determining the sense bound up in language is the way the world is. And since human practices do not take place in a vacuum, the ability to act plausibly entails correctly understanding some fragment or aspects of the world: Even where successful action does not require the ability to formulate that understanding linguistically, it may nonetheless involve commitments that can generally be interpreted as embodying 'implicit' knowledge of various facts. Nonetheless, the role of practical requirements, or the perspective of purpose, in shaping linguistic articulation renders unclear the extent to which practices can be thought to embody accurate representation of the surrounding world. After all, many practices are sustained either without needing to get the world relevantly right, or without our understanding correctly what it is their practical perspective is getting right.<sup>316</sup> In the traditional language of representation, the 'ideas' they embody are 'confused' rather than 'clear and distinct'. So although it would be philosophically convenient to think of linguistic articulation as straightforwardly encoding features of the world, the idea is phenomenologically unconvincing. A phenomenological approach must instead view the 'impurities' due to its embedding in the world not as inessential accretions, but as features essential to an understanding of what language is and does. Accordingly both the process and the product of linguistic articulation should be seen as the result of a complex structuration involving both practice and the sedimented semiotic horizon, as well as other ('represented') aspects of the environing world.

This blending of different structural inputs in linguistic articulation is reflected at the more specific level of the Heideggerian framework in the dual instrumentality of linguistic signs. To recall, Heidegger describes the disclosive function of linguistic signs both generically, as enabling agents to noninferentially grasp features of the world; and more particularly, as the means for performing certain tasks just as other tools. This chapter and the last have shown, based on the views of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein respectively, how these two aspects of instrumentality can be understood using the notions of presentational and pragmatic sense. The

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<sup>316</sup> Examples of the former might include cultic, religious, superstitious practices, and fashion. Scientific practices would exemplify the latter kind: Even if we think his views are strictly speaking false, Newton was getting something significantly right about gravitation.

presentational sense of expressions, it was suggested, is due to the sublexical-lexical structure of an iteratively evolved sign system. As a result of this structure, words are characterized by the inchoate rationality and situated interpretability that allow them to function – in the generic instrumental sense – as a means for making distinctions and thus pointing out features of the world. The pragmatic sense of expressions can be understood in terms of the structure of language-using practices. For rules or regularities exhibited in word usage simultaneously characterize the structure of such practices and provide a general means for describing the various tasks played by word-instruments. Both these kinds of sense, as previously anticipated, suggest that linguistic signs function as instruments in an intrinsic rather than the extrinsic Lockean sense.<sup>317</sup> That is, language functions in both cases as an instrument essentially involved in meaning constitution: on Merleau-Ponty's view words are the very materials of which thoughts are constructed, whereas for Wittgenstein their use in certain ways is constitutive of the corresponding language-games.

The idea of dual instrumentality implies that linguistic signs should be thought of as uniting presentational and pragmatic sense. Despite this unity, their distinction is motivated in two ways by the requirements of phenomenological accuracy. First, each corresponds to a basic phenomenological feature: the idea of pragmatic sense does justice to the way linguistic meaning is shaped by human practices (language-games); that of presentational sense reflects the fact that sublexical structure is integral to the way linguistic signs function. They thus correspond individually to the obvious facts that the entities of which languages consist are words and that words are used to get things done, and collectively to the fact that words are literally *involved in* the constitution of linguistic meaning. Second, each comes into play in different types of situation. In many practical contexts, the kind of expressive potential a word might have in virtue of its form will be irrelevant to its functioning. Conversely, the way a word's lexical form encodes associations and 'imagery', rather than adhering to established use, might be decisive factors in expressive contexts where finding the 'right word' is important. In the former case one relies on standard patterns of use (pragmatic sense), in the latter on how the word presents objects (presentational sense).

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<sup>317</sup> Cf. page 76 above.

These comments suggest, as hinted above, that the relationship between pragmatic and presentational sense should be thought of as one of symbiotic complementarity. In connecting the two, a word can be thought of bringing both a presentational perspective and a background of use to each situation it is used in. In much the same way as the two aspects of a duck-rabbit figure, each comes to the fore in different situations in the light of different needs.<sup>318</sup> It is by combining these two distinct aspects of sense articulation that the dual-instrumentality model of linguistic signs provides a basis for explaining the range of phenomena mentioned at the start of my Introduction. On the one hand, the notion of pragmatic sense provides a means for describing the range of abilities in terms of which practical linguistic competence can be gauged, those abilities one must generally possess so as to integrate inconspicuously into a 'language community' and count as 'mastering' a natural language. On the other hand, the notion of presentational sense identifies the cumulative process and the differential factors that make linguistic expressions (re)interpretable for use in both existing and novel ways, and on which one relies in careful use or in developing new expressions.

One of the principal theses underlying Heidegger's position is that all disclosure of the world is embedded or founded in prepredicative Equipmental or purposive awareness. Furthermore, I suggested, his position allows that some language use or some aspects of language are prepredicative in character. The intervening chapters have attempted to give this idea plausibility by showing how presentational and pragmatic sense are not only themselves phenomenologically plausible, but also each capable of being grasped prepredicatively (as well as founding predicative abilities). In the case of presentational sense this involves grasping the differential force of a word as a means of expression in the context of a sign system, in that of pragmatic sense how it maps a pattern of similarities in the context of a language-game. Neither of these abilities, it has been argued, entail awareness of the expression's inferential import. The fact that these abilities can exist in unison – as might be expected from the dual-instrumentality idea – gives rise to the idea of a basic linguistic sensitivity in which both are grasped prepredicatively.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> A partial analogy to this kind of dual-functioning is found with many designer or fashionable goods – e.g. clothes, furniture, cars – which serve both to fulfil some practical need and to present their owner in a certain way.

<sup>319</sup> Despite obvious proximity, my suggestion here differs in at least two important ways from Derrida's idea of 'différance' as the temporalizing/spatializing (nonconceptual) 'movement of play

Such sensitivity to differences and patterns of similarity would suffice for participation in the kind of prejustificatory language-games on which Wittgenstein's view of language is based. And in this way, I suggest, prepredicative language use can be understood both as itself sufficing to characterize competence in many language-games and as a foundational stratum of language-games on which predicative abilities are praxeologically based, constituting – in Seel's (2002, 50) apt term – a 'domain-opening understanding of things'.

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[*mouvement de jeu*] that "produces" the differences 'in the *system* of language [*langue*]' (Derrida 1972, 8, 12). Whereas Derrida emphasizes the intractability of this 'movement' and treats it (in all but rhetoric) as an ultimate metaphysical principle (*archi-écriture*), I am here highlighting that something *can* be said about the underlying structuration of propositional/conceptual content. Further, whereas Derrida (1967, 89) dismisses the 'concept of experience' as 'highly embarrassing' due to its supposed inseparability from the idea of full presence he discerns in Husserl, experience seems to me the requisite point of reference for conceiving language. This need is also highlighted by Merleau-Ponty (*S* 149), whose emphasis on perception as a paradigm aims to reconceive experience as partial presence.



## CHAPTER IV

# SOME IMPLICATIONS OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

The preceding chapters have focused primarily on developing a framework found in Heidegger's *SZ* into a more detailed 'phenomenological' conception of language. This final chapter will focus on two issues in order to locate that conception in a broader philosophical and discursive context and so to provide some indication of how it contributes to philosophical understanding of language. The first three sections concentrate on the specific aspect of the Heideggerian framework I have developed, ascertaining the relevance of this view of linguistic articulation, and in particular its emphasis on prepredicative factors, in relation to more mainstream views in philosophy of language. The final two sections turn to a more general issue in considering whether or not the phenomenological conception of language developed here should be thought of as having realist or nonrealist implications.

### 1. Two approaches to language

In chapter I it was suggested that a distinctive feature of the Heideggerian framework is the view that predicative awareness is founded in prepredicative awareness of entities. Having there considered what claims this idea of prepredicative foundation involves, two kinds of feature have since been discussed about which such claims – viz. that they are subpropositional, subinferential and heterologous – might be made. The starting point was the interpretation of Heidegger's conception of signs as being shaped by two kinds of articulatory factor, respectively labelled 'presentational' and 'pragmatic' sense, corresponding to the form of linguistic signs and the form of practices. The subsequent chapters have drawn on Merleau-Ponty's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of language to explicate these two notions of sense, attempting to show that the results are both phenomenologically plausible and identify structural features which can be grasped prepredicatively.

What makes the idea of prepredicative founding particularly interesting, it was originally suggested, is that it gives specific focus to the differences between the

phenomenological conception of language developed here and more common philosophical approaches to language. For given Heidegger's view of the content of Statements as predicative content and as a 'derivative' mode of Setting-out, this foundational claim challenges the primacy of propositional meaning usually assumed in post-Fregean philosophy of language. The purpose of this section and the next two is to return to this foundational claim and consider in more detail both how it should be interpreted and how the phenomenological approach suggested here, along with the prepredicative factors it identifies, contributes more generally to an understanding of the articulatory feats of language. The remainder of this first section considers how the phenomenological approach contrasts with what I previously referred to as the semantics approach and several ways of construing Heidegger's foundational claim. The second section investigates further this foundational claim by showing how the need for phenomenological founding arises and can be accommodated within the semantics approach. This will leave open the possibility that the founding relationship is too weak to be of particular interest, so that semantics might claim to provide a philosophically adequate conception of language. The third section thus aims to show how differences in the functioning of prepredicative factors and semantic properties rule this out in favour of a somewhat stronger claim on behalf of the phenomenological conception developed here.

As just mentioned, the phenomenological conception of language developed here contrasts with what might reasonably be considered the standard approach in contemporary philosophy of language. In the following I will take this approach, the semantics approach – or simply semantics, to be characterized by four minimal commitments that might be described as the 'common sense' of post-Fregean philosophy of language.<sup>320</sup> The first of these is its working vocabulary: language is conceived of in terms of 'propositions' and 'concepts', which are 'expressed' in sentences and words; the workings of language are discussed in terms of 'reference' and (perhaps) 'meaning' or 'sense', and distinguished as 'semantic' rather than 'causal' in character. The relationship between propositions and concepts is characterized, second, by assuming the notion of propositional content – rather than,

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<sup>320</sup> In describing this set of commitments as 'common sense' the suggestion is not that anyone defends them in this form, but rather that they would generally be considered too obvious and too indistinct to require explicit formulation or defence. – As Dummett (1991, 2 f.) says, 'analytical philosophy is written by people' who 'take for granted the principles of semantic analysis embodied in [the language of mathematic logic]' – 'however little many of them may know of the technical results or even concepts of modern logical theory'.

say, word meaning – to be explanatorily primary; and, third, by thinking of concepts (along with singular terms) as the building blocks of which propositions are composed. Fourth, the semantic properties of propositions and concepts are assumed to be linked in a systematic way, with the functioning of concepts being understood in terms of the contribution made to (the explanatorily primary) propositional content. In Frege's view this systematic link is represented by means of a predicate calculus, based on the idea that concepts are analogous to mathematical functions which take various objects (or other functions) as their 'arguments' to make up propositions and thus yield a 'value' – according to Frege (1994a), a truth value. Although details of its use may vary, it will be assumed in the following that the semantics approach is characterized by the assumption that the kind of systematic link holding between concepts and propositions can be modelled using some version of a predicate calculus.

The semantics approach has obvious and powerful attractions. Above all, by construing language in an algorithmic manner it seems to hold out the prospect of a systematic theory of language that will exhibit its pervasively rational internal workings. With this intimation of systematicity and its close link with formal logic the semantics approach might seem to fulfil modern philosophy's craving for a *mathesis universalis*.<sup>321</sup> At the same time, the semantics approach is clearly theory-driven: its central notions – and the systematicity they augur – are guided not by the goal of accurately describing the way language appears to be, but by the availability of a certain model and the prospect of revealing an initially nonmanifest ('deep') structure. In this respect it not only paints a somewhat different picture of language from that developed in the preceding chapters, but is precisely the kind of 'reconstructive' approach traditionally opposed (often quite rhetorically) by 'phenomenological' positions. This accentuates the question as to the relationship between the semantics approach and the phenomenological approach developed here. Although the two are *prima facie* at odds, this does entail genuine dissent, since not only do different 'approaches' not necessarily lead to different conceptions, but apparently 'different' conceptions may not be in genuine conflict. On the one hand, that an approach is theory-driven, or 'reconstructive', is not in itself an objection, and may be fully compatible with phenomenological facts. On the other hand, the

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<sup>321</sup> That is, in Descartes' (1996, 378) words, 'a general science explicating everything that can be investigated concerning order and measure without being attributed to any particular material'.

predominance of the semantic approach's conceptual idiom cannot count against the relevance of phenomenological facts to a philosophically satisfactory conception of language. The situation is rather that if a systematic semantic theory is to be possible, a condition of its adequacy will be that it should ultimately cohere with a phenomenological conception of language. In this light, examining this relationship in some detail will be a means of probing the philosophical relevance of *both* the phenomenological approach developed here and the semantic approach with which it – in some sense – contrasts.

How then do the conceptions of language yielded by the respective approaches in fact differ? Both approaches are clearly in some way concerned with the question of what meaning is or what it is for language to be meaningful.<sup>322</sup> However, in discussing their responses to this question, and the relationship between the two approaches, some terminological distinctions will be convenient. The phenomenological approach, I shall say, is concerned with – presentational and pragmatic – *sense*; structurally relevant influences on or features of sense will termed *factors*; with the 'sense' due to such factors being something that can be grasped either prepredicatively or predicatively. Conversely, the semantics approach deals with – propositional and conceptual – *content*; features bearing on content will be referred to as (semantic) *properties*. Hence, in a concise formula, the two approaches can be said to differ in offering different views of the subpropositional, i.e. of what propositional content consists in.

As a first step towards better understanding what underlies these terminological differences, two ways in which these approaches differ substantively should be distinguished. The first is with regard to the ontological priorities they suggest, i.e. which items they posit as central to a philosophical conception of language. The phenomenological view developed here has focused on words and acts of speech (utterances) as the basic features in terms of which linguistic phenomena

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<sup>322</sup> Sean Kelly (2001, 4) suggests these questions are distinct, with analytic philosophy of language focusing on *what* sentences mean ('meaning') whereas phenomenology considers what it is for a sentence to mean what it does ('meaningfulness'). The problem with this, otherwise appealing, reconciliation is the tacit assumption that these questions *can* be answered independently. Indeed, it seems to presuppose the semantic notion of content to be satisfactory, whereas the point of the phenomenological approach's foundational claims is that the notion of propositional/conceptual content cannot be made sense of independently (unphenomenologically), so that the phenomenological approach is involved in answering 'what sentences mean'. The thought that the two approaches differ in the questions they address therefore cannot form the starting point in considering their relationship as I am doing here.

are to be conceived. In this perspective propositions are derivative entities, or an abstraction based on commonalities between sentences, with concepts, as the constituents of propositions, a further abstraction. By contrast, the semantic approach treats propositions and concepts as fundamental posits, in relation to which sentences and words stand in a derivative relation of 'expression' (e.g. 'Snow is white' and 'Schnee ist weiß' express the same proposition). On this approach there is at least an intimation that propositions in some way exist independently of their instantiation or expression in sentences. For the assumption is that the way propositions and concepts function can be understood or modelled independently of the role of actual words and sentences. Thus it seems that, whether or not they do, propositions and concepts might exist in some way antecedent to their expression in linguistic acts.

The two approaches further differ in how they see language functioning. On the phenomenological approach this is understood with regard to the public phenomenology of language use, with the suggestion here being that linguistic signs are instruments in a dual sense – for presenting objects and for specific tasks – whose articulatory feats can be thought of in terms of the structure of the sign-system and practices. On the semantics approach the functioning of language is likened to that of mathematical functions, the picture being, roughly, one of set-theoretical mappings of entities and a hierarchical network of functions onto truth values. The two approaches thus provide different general views of the articulatory processes at work in language, and so of what Taylor (1985, 256) describes as the 'speaking activity' or 'what is going on in language'.

Observing these contrasts succeeds more in raising than solving the question of how the phenomenological and semantics approaches are related. However, this question is given greater focus by Heidegger's claim that propositional content is founded in prepredicative awareness, which suggests that the idea of 'founding' should apply to the relationship between the phenomenological and semantics approaches. Such a foundational claim can be construed in several ways. Most straightforwardly, corresponding to the differences just mentioned, it may be construed as either ontological or functional founding: i.e. as viewing propositions and concepts either as existing only via sentences and words, or as something whose operational logic presupposes prepredicative abilities.

The first thing to be said of the ontological claim is that it is obviously, perhaps even trivially, true. For it is clear that the actual presence of language must be

conceived of in terms of linguistic acts, the sentences uttered in these, and the words of which they are composed. So if the obscurities of platonism are to be avoided, the ontological priorities at work in language are straightforwardly elicited: If they are to be considered part of the ontological picture, propositions must be thought of in terms of classes of (synonymous) declarative sentences, and concepts linked with the existence of words as their bearers. Moreover, since sentences – utterances – are transient events, words (and sublexical elements) have a certain claim to primacy as more enduring items in a linguistic ontology.<sup>323</sup> These considerations serve as a reminder – paralleling the ontological realizability condition that Heidegger had relied on against Husserl – that the way language is thought to function must be able to be instantiated by the entities assumed in a conception of language. In this way they provide some justification for thinking both that propositions ought not to form the centrepiece of a philosophical conception of language, and that any satisfactory conception should reflect how the actual functioning of words is involved in linguistic meaning. Even so, it is not clear that the ontological foundation claim suffices to establish any tension between the phenomenological and semantics approaches. To begin with, as long as word-sentence relationships are thought to function in the same way as those between concepts and propositions, such foundation can readily be acknowledged by the semantics approach. Nor does it mean there is no point in talking of propositions. For it may still be necessary to characterize the function of words – so to speak, teleologically – in relation to their role in propositions, and it is not clear that this requires propositions’ being thought of as reified in a platonic manner.

The more interesting and more involved claim is that of functional founding. A preliminary difficulty is how to construe such a claim in contemporary terms, given that Heidegger’s views are formulated using the traditional idiom of subject-predicate logic. Two considerations suggest, however, that this is fairly straightforward. First, Heidegger’s antiformalism is presented generically and does not hinge on the details of the ‘formalist’ approach he opposes. Second, while providing a framework for a contemporary formalism, Frege himself (1994c, 67, 72n) describes functional concepts as ‘predicative’ in the general sense of not yielding a value without an argument (being ‘unsaturated’), and makes no provision for anything that might be

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<sup>323</sup> This fact is nicely brought out by Ricoeur (1969a, 93) in highlighting the role of words as ‘as an exchanger between the system and the act, between the structure and the event’.

described as ‘prepredicative’ contributions to or formation of propositional content. With these two points in mind it seems natural, in a post-Fregean context, to construe Heidegger’s claim simply as being that the notions deployed in the semantic approach are functionally founded in those identified by the phenomenological approach.

A further complication concerns the ambitiousness of the functional foundation claim. A strong foundational claim would be that semantic properties are effectively epiphenomenal, and can be explained (reductively) in terms of prepredicative factors. A weak foundational claim would acknowledge that prepredicative factors underlie semantic properties, but deny that this in any way compromises the explanatory adequacy of the semantics approach. A further possibility is a moderate foundational claim that semantic properties presuppose prepredicative abilities, while allowing that the two levels function in mutually irreducible ways, so that an account of both is required for a satisfactory philosophical understanding of linguistic articulation. To assess which claim best represents the relationship between the semantic approach’s predicative functioning and the prepredicative processes identified by the phenomenological approach here two questions are decisive: In what way, if any, does the semantics approach require the phenomenological approach and prepredicative abilities? Can prepredicative abilities be understood in semantic terms or vice versa? These two questions will form the focus of the next two sections.

## **2. The semantic need for foundation**

To show how a need for the phenomenological approach arises from the perspective of semantics I want to consider Donald Davidson’s views on language. One reason for focusing on Davidson is that, in addition to being highly influential, he typifies the semantics approach in seeing predicate calculus as the core of a philosophical theory of language. However, rather than concentrating on technical issues involved in its development – such as how best to deal with logically ‘recalcitrant’ terms, or even whether truth-conditions provide the best basis for a semantic theory – I want here to take Davidson’s proposal as a programmatic one, as he himself often did (e.g. Davidson 2001, 57, 132 f.). In this respect a distinctive feature of Davidson’s work is to formulate a proposal as to how semantic theory might be deployed empirically in the study of language. After briefly outlining this proposal, I will focus on two issues that bring out the need for a phenomenological approach.

In general terms Davidson's programme is characterized by its appropriation of Tarski's semantic conception of truth to natural language as 'the sophisticated and powerful foundation of a competent theory of meaning' (Davidson 2001, 25). This programme combines two basic thoughts. The first is that a theory which states the truth conditions for any sentence of a language would, at least to a good approximation, comprise a theory of meaning for that language. The second is that Tarski's conception of truth for formalized languages can be adapted to meet this truth-conditional requirement with regard to natural languages. Tarski (1944) himself saw sentences of the form 'S is true if and only if p' – so-called 'T-sentences' – as having a role in defining the truth predicate for a formal language. By linking a sequence of signs, named or structurally described by S, with its truth conditions, stated by p – as in "'Snow is white" if and only if snow is white.' – such a sentence provides a partial definition of truth. The definition of a truth predicate would be 'materially adequate' if it entails a sentence of this form for all (declarative) sentences of the language under consideration (Tarski 1944, 341). One further complication is that, to avoid inconsistencies due to self-reference, Tarski distinguishes the 'metalanguage' in which T-sentences are formulated from the 'object language' to which the definition of truth applies. So in a T-sentence p states in the metalanguage the truth conditions of the object-language sentence S. Although sensitive to the potential difficulties in transferring these ideas to natural language, Davidson proposes to exploit Tarski's method of exhibiting material adequacy while reversing the order of explanation: Tarski had assumed that semantic properties of an object language could be stated in a metalanguage, and that this allowed truth to be defined. Davidson instead assumes that truth is basic – i.e. that a truth predicate exists and is implicitly grasped by speakers – and that the task is to construct a theory capable of stating the semantic properties of an object language, i.e. a theory which produces T-sentences as its output. For Davidson T-sentences thus function as criteria of adequacy on this type of theory, rather than on a definition of truth as they had for Tarski. As Davidson (2001, 60) puts it, he is recommending 'not a particular theory, but a criterion of theories' intended to give 'the empirical study of language [...] clarity and significance'.

The aspiration to an empirical theory of meaning leads one to expect a view of how semantic theory should be calibrated to linguistic phenomena. Davidson's basic suggestion – that which 'gives clarity' to empirical study of language – is that



theories can be tested by evidence that T-sentences are true (Davidson 2001, 134). T-sentences are thus to serve as criteria on truth theories in the dual sense of both specifying the kind of output required and rendering them empirically testable. At one point Davidson suggests this would make testing truth theories straightforward: ‘all that is needed is the ability to recognize when the required biconditionals are true. [...] in principle it is no harder to test the adequacy of a theory of truth than it is for a competent speaker of English to decide whether sentences like “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white” are true’ (Davidson 2001, 62 f.). One procedural complication which Davidson does acknowledge is that the sentences a speaker holds to be true depend on both the meaning of terms in his language and his beliefs. Given this ‘interdependence of meaning and belief’, he suggests that in developing a theory of truth one could begin by assuming an attitude of ‘holding true’ of sentences on the speaker’s part (Davidson 2001, 134 f.). This is intended not to exclude speakers taking different attitudes to propositional content, but as a procedural heuristic allowing one to work on the assumption that a successful theory would maximize agreement between what speakers and interpreters consider to be true about the world.<sup>324</sup> Against this background Davidson suggests that the procedure in developing an empirical theory of truth would be to build up a body of evidence for the T-sentences that particular speakers hold true at a particular time.<sup>325</sup> The evidence gathered by such piecemeal verification of T-sentences could, he continues, be used to construct a theory of interpretation for an unknown language in three stages: the first ‘identifies predicates, singular terms, quantifiers, connectives, and identity’, the second deals with indexicals, the third with sentences on which there is not ‘universal agreement’. Davidson (2001, 137) intends this method ‘to solve the problem of the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning’.

Davidson also presents his programme as answering the question ‘What is it for words to mean what they do?’, emphasizing that ‘a satisfactory theory of meaning

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<sup>324</sup> Davidson (2001, 135) claims that holding true ‘is an attitude an interpreter may plausibly be taken to be able to identify before he can interpret, since he may know that a person intends to express a truth without having any idea *what* truth’. It seems to me that this ‘plausibility’ is highly questionable. How is one to know, prior to interpretation, what attitude a speaker has to a sentence? The general assumption of such an attitude seems to be motivated rather by the fact that it is most congenial to a truth-conditional approach.

<sup>325</sup> Davidson 2001, 135 f. – Though there is something of an apriori tension in gathering empirical data for a theory that deals with the contextual variability of indexicals by being relativized to speakers and times (cf. Davidson 2001, 131, 34).

must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words' (Davidson 2001, xv, 17). His focus on the role of words is motivated by the requirement to account for the basic fact that languages are learnable: given the plausible thought that speakers are able to understand and produce a potentially infinite number of sentences, learnability requires 'the meaning of each sentence' to be 'a function of a finite number of features of the sentence' (Davidson 2001, 8). A second requirement can be brought out by noting that conceiving a general algorithm to produce T-sentences for any declarative sentence is trivial: all that is needed is a disquotation function, yielding the right-hand side of a T-sentence by either simply removing the quotes around the entire string, or picking out syntactic elements on the left and reconstructing them on the right as p. But this clearly makes life too simple. For what T-sentences are supposed to do, as outlined above, is correlate descriptions of sentences with their truth conditions, i.e. bits of syntax with bits of semantics.<sup>326</sup> Accordingly, for Davidson (2001, 130) a 'satisfactory theory for interpreting the utterances of a language' is subject to the further constraint of revealing 'significant semantic structure'. The means for meeting this dual requirement – learnability and revealing semantic structure – is a predicate calculus of the Fregean kind, and it is in terms of this that Davidson ultimately characterizes the role of words. As he puts it, his 'working assumption' is that 'nothing more than standard first-order quantification theory is available', with the aim being a 'recursive theory of truth' that allows all true expressions to be analysed in terms of a finite number of elements and rules for their combination (Davidson 2001, xvii, 57). In *Tractarian* spirit such a recursive theory would ultimately be based on 'semantical primitives', the 'semantic properties' of which are to be 'give[n] outright' (Davidson 2001, 9, 70).

How convincing are these two features of Davidson's programme? First of all, to what extent does Davidson's empiricism clarify the relationship between semantic theory and linguistic phenomena? I suggest, not very far. The problem with what Davidson (2001, 137) himself terms a 'free-style appeal to the notion of evidential support' is not its vagueness, but that no empirical method is really identified. This can be illustrated by considering the difficulties that would remain for a linguist, say, in putting Davidson's ideas to work. The verification of T-sentences, for example, is not as straightforward as it might seem. It is unlikely that most 'competent speakers'

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<sup>326</sup> This requirement is clearly brought out by translation cases – "Schnee ist weiß" iff snow is white' – where the metalanguage is not contained in the object language.

of English would see the sentence “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white’ as having any meaning, let alone being true. If speakers do (having been introduced to the use-mention distinction) assent to the truth of T-sentences, how is one to know that this involves anything more than the ability to recognize a case of disquotation, i.e. that they are assenting in the right, semantically revealing, way?<sup>327</sup> Or again, what is it to ‘hold belief constant’ while ‘solving for meaning’? For this imposing mathematical metaphor to make sense, it would have to be cashed out in procedural terms. What Davidson means, presumably, is to assume simply that speakers believe what their words express, so that we can interpret the meaning of the terms they use. But what would the (procedural) difference be in ‘holding constant’ meaning while ‘solving for’ beliefs? Presumably there is none, the metaphor has not been cashed out.<sup>328</sup> What these examples illustrate is that Davidson’s proposal for an empirical theory of truth for a language never extends to what one might call the ‘phenomenology of corroboration’, i.e. a description of what one would in practice do to test a truth theory.<sup>329</sup> Instead of outlining a genuinely empirical approach, Davidson simply identifies desiderata for a method of corroboration from the perspective of a theory he would like to work. Far from sufficing to make his approach genuinely empirical, hinting at the use of T-sentences as a criterion of theoretical adequacy is merely an idea (how to be tested) for an idea (predicate calculus approach) for a theory (an empirically testable theory).

What about Davidson’s account of what it is for words to mean what they do? A conspicuous feature is that it characterizes their functioning without any specific reference to words, such that, for all it tells us, the same function could be performed by pictorial or musical elements, or any suitably used physical objects. This makes words instruments in the ‘extrinsic’ Lockean sense, rather than the sense advocated here which sees them as intrinsically related to linguistic meaning. From my phenomenological perspective it is therefore natural to suggest that Davidson’s view fails to do justice to either the link between words and practice (pragmatic sense) or

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<sup>327</sup> This difficulty would be avoided in translation cases – but would assume bilingualism on the part of agents.

<sup>328</sup> Davidson’s suggestion is in effect that it in an empirical project of the kind he envisages it would be reasonable to assume initially an attitude that does not distinguish between speakers’ beliefs and meanings. Fair enough. But this is not holding one constant and solving for the other.

<sup>329</sup> By contrast Quine’s (1960, 26-79) discussion of radical translation clearly meets this requirement. Even if one feels the whole scenario is simply an illustration or projection of his behaviourism, Quine offers a fairly detailed sketch of how the radical translator would proceed in going about his work.

the basis of their interpretability (presentational sense). In this perspective it provides an incomplete picture of words' functioning in failing to take account of the factors that determine both the stability and elasticity of the expressive means of language.

Against this it may be urged that the explanatory strength of Davidson's account lies precisely in this extrinsic character, that what words do must be characterized independently of their doing it.<sup>330</sup> But is Davidson's proposal really independent in the required way? Recall its architecture: A truth theory for an object language is to be stated in a metalanguage, the latter being used to 'give outright' and to state rules for the combination of 'the semantic properties of certain of the basic expressions' (Davidson 2001, 70). Since the object-language semantics are to be stated in the metalanguage, the question arises as to what the meaning of terms in the metalanguage consists in. This hints at a dilemma, with the choice apparently between a potential regress of metalanguages and question-begging by assuming the metalanguage to be antecedently interpreted. To avoid this dilemma, Davidson might respond that giving semantic properties 'outright' means 'without appeal to any semantical concepts beyond the basic "refers to"' (Davidson 2001, 18). But reliance on a *soi disant* 'basic' notion of reference is illusory. The fact that one might choose to characterize semantic properties in a simple form, suggestive of referents' being given 'outright', does not make them 'basic'. This is the lesson of Wittgenstein's critique of ostensive definition and the assumption of simples: there is no such thing as simple referring; what 'reference' is (even at the 'metalanguage' level) must ultimately be understood in terms of the roles played in language-games.<sup>331</sup> In this sense the interpretedness of the metalanguage *is* implicitly assumed. Davidson might accept this point as part of his approach, but it nonetheless indicates a limitation of his extrinsic characterization of what words do. For even if it is allowed that a Davidsonian approach maps those properties of words relevant to their contribution to propositional content, its account of what it is for words to mean what they do is incomplete at best. Its incompleteness illustrates how the semantic approach requires the phenomenological approach: For the inadequacy is not simply that of saying too little, remaining vague, about what makes words meaningful. Rather it is locating meaning in a set of false primitives (reference, truth, satisfaction), the intelligibility of

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<sup>330</sup> The thought being that instruments are means to independently specifiable ends ('what it is for': a saw is for cutting wood, a pencil for making marks on paper, etc.).

<sup>331</sup> Cf. page 145 above.

which presupposes understanding of how to interpret the metalanguage in practical terms.

Davidson's approach to language thus exhibits two important inadequacies in failing to account satisfactorily for either the connection between semantic theory and linguistic phenomena or the way words function. All the same, it would be a mistake to think these inadequacies are specific to Davidson. Indeed it is a virtue of his proposal for an empirical deployment of semantic theory that it develops some account of these relationships. The two inadequacies just outlined should instead be considered characteristic of semantics more generally, and as thus showing how the need arises within the semantics approach for the kind of account the phenomenological approach provides.

Once this need is acknowledged, the question is how the phenomenological approach, in particular the prepredicative factors it identifies, might be accommodated within the semantics approach's broad framework of commitments. In the latter perspective the most natural interpretation of the functional foundation claim would be to see the semantics approach and phenomenological approach as complementary. What would this involve? A good starting point is the tripartite general architecture proposed by Dummett (1976), according to which a theory of meaning should encompass a 'theory of reference', a 'theory of sense' and a 'theory of force'. The core of such a theory of meaning is the theory of reference, which aims to characterize the meaning of all assertoric sentences of a language in terms of one semantic concept that is assumed to be basic. This is the role Davidson's theory would fulfil within Dummett's architecture. A theory of force is to expand the theory's account of assertoric meaning to cover sentences differing in mood, such as interrogatives, imperatives, and optatives. Of particular interest here, however, is the theory of sense. This is to 'lay down in what a speaker's knowledge of any part of the theory of reference is to be taken to consist', thus relating the theory of reference to 'the speaker's mastery of his language', correlating 'his knowledge of the propositions of the theory of truth with practical linguistic abilities which he displays'.<sup>332</sup> It would be natural to interpret the phenomenological approach developed here as comprising

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<sup>332</sup> Dummett 1976, 74, 82. Dummett's interpretation of such a theory of speakers' abilities as corresponding to Frege's notion of sense is by no means unpresupposing, and might be challenged exegetically. However, such concerns can be neglected here.

such a theory of sense, with the views drawn from Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein comprising a phenomenological description of the abilities of speakers in which semantic properties are manifested. In saying this, it should be highlighted that understanding sense in terms of speakers' abilities is not to understand it in terms of mental or psychological states, or anything else 'in the head'. Rather phenomenological descriptions of abilities linked with presentational and pragmatic sense rely only on publicly available features of signs and the practices in which they are used. They can thus be considered to explicate how the perspective under which objects are linguistically addressed is built up, while accommodating the objective perspectival character Frege saw as characterizing sense without appeal to Frege's own obscure platonism.<sup>333</sup>

The simplest way of construing their complementarity in this Dummettian framework would be to think of the phenomenological and semantics approaches as addressing the same processes in different terms. Their respective conceptions of language would then be *homologous*, i.e. function in the same way, so that the semantic properties of expressions correspond 1:1 to their roles as described (or at least describable) within a phenomenological perspective. Such homologous complementarity could even be construed as a foundational relationship, since it allows that semantic properties would not exist but for their phenomenological manifestation.

There is, however, a problem with a straightforward appeal to homologous complementarity, due to the key feature of the semantics approach, viz. its ability to explain how the meaning of sentences might be thought of as composed of the meaning of its parts. This is not to presuppose that the semantics approach has the right answer to this question. It is an open question whether there has to be, or even could be, a unitary notion of sentence meaning, such as predicate calculus assumes, that explains the specific feats of sentences satisfactorily. It is also quite possible that alternative accounts of how sentence meaning is built up by words could be offered. Nor is it beyond question that there is a need for a 'systematic' account of this relationship between words and sentences. Perhaps this supposed need is bound up with the conviction that sentential meaning is primary and the perceived ability of

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<sup>333</sup> Cf. Frege's (1994b, 45) analogy with the 'image in [a] telescope', which 'is dependent on its location, yet it is objective insofar as it can serve several observers'. – His platonism is most clearly in evidence in Frege 1986.

predicate calculus to provide such an account. Nonetheless, it is true that the semantics approach articulates an answer to the question of how sentence and word meaning are related, whereas the phenomenological approach, so far as it has been developed here, does not. Hence there is an asymmetry in that the semantics approach has a feature to which nothing on the phenomenological approach here corresponds, meaning that the complementarity of the two cannot be one of straightforward correspondence. This has the consequence of ruling out the strong foundational claim: for if nothing in the phenomenological conception corresponds to the combination of words in sentences, then there is nothing for a semantic account of the relationship between propositions and concepts to supervene on. So while Dummett's notion of sense points in the right direction, the functional foundational claim that can be made on behalf of the phenomenological approach must instead be a partial one. On the one hand, word meanings should, I suggest, be thought of as presupposing and corresponding to the kind of factors – presentational and pragmatic sense – identified by a phenomenological 'theory of sense'. However, on the other hand, the specific relationship between sentence and word meaning remains an aspect of linguistic functioning addressed only by the semantics approach. Even if it is indispensable, the phenomenological conception offers only a partial account of the abilities speakers have, a necessary part perhaps, but not the whole of a theory of sense.

A second, and somewhat more specific, way of thinking about the complementarity between the semantics and phenomenological approaches is suggested by John Searle's idea of 'Background' as the foundation for intentional (or 'representational') states. Whereas intentional states are defined in terms of satisfaction conditions, Searle explains, 'Background is a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place'; it comprises not propositional "knowing-that", but 'certain kinds of know-how: I must know how things are and I must know how to do things'.<sup>334</sup> The principal role of Background, which encompasses 'deep' human biological and 'local' enculturated levels, is to provide the operational context for literal or metaphorical propositional content, which 'requires for its understanding more than the semantic content of the component expressions and the rules for their combination'.<sup>335</sup> The dependency,

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<sup>334</sup> Searle 1983, 143, cf. 154: Background is 'a set of skills, stances, preintentional assumptions and presuppositions, practices, and habits'.

<sup>335</sup> Searle 1983, 146; cf. 143 f., 145-150; also Searle 1979.

Searle emphasizes, is such that the Background '*permeates*' intentional states; it is 'enabling not determining', i.e. provides 'necessary but not sufficient conditions for understanding' (Searle 1983, 151, 158).

Two qualifications should be mentioned. First: Sometimes Searle explains the role of background in terms of background assumptions, e.g. those made when ordering a meal in a restaurant (cf. Searle 1979, 127; 1992, 180). Presumably to accommodate this feature, he came to include in Background 'unconscious intentional' states, understood to be 'dispositional states of the brain' of the right form – i.e. genuinely intentional and with aspectual shape – 'to produce conscious thoughts and conscious behavior'.<sup>336</sup> Although such states might be 'background' in the sense of being presupposed or implied by conscious, or occurrent, intentional states, their inclusion in it means that not all Background is 'preintentional'. For my purposes here, however, this extension can be disregarded, as the concern will be only with Background in the sense of pre- or nonintentional capacities. Second: Although Searle (1983, 16) presents his as a 'non-ontological approach to Intentionality', he nonetheless characterizes the Background as mental. Given Heidegger's rejection of the notion of subjectivity (SZ 46), this might seem to suggest incompatibility with a Heideggerian framework. For the present purposes, however, this difference can, I suggest, be disregarded, since in describing the functioning of language, any relevant Background abilities can be (in Wittgensteinian spirit) thought of as characterizable in terms of an impersonal public phenomenology, so that the label 'mental' entails no obviously problematic assimilation to a mind-based ontology.

With these two qualifications, the present suggestion (going beyond Searle) is that the Background has a specifically linguistic component. Accordingly, the accounts of presentational and pragmatic sense developed here identify – as a partial theory of sense – Background features that shape and pervade semantic content. This suggestion is possible because the prepredicative factors they rely on are presupposed in the same 'preintentional' way as Searle's Background. For the abilities to use words to mark distinctions or to instantiate correct use in the context of a language-game, corresponding to presentational and pragmatic sense respectively, cannot in turn require the ability to state in language corresponding conditions of

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<sup>336</sup> Searle 1992, 160 f.; for this revision to his earlier (1983) view cf. 186-191.



satisfaction.<sup>337</sup> Rather, the intelligibility of propositional content presupposes such abilities, as precisely the kinds of knowing how things are and how to do things in terms of which Searle defines Background. Moreover, because to exercise these abilities requires a grasp of the structure of both a language's sign system and the relevant language-games, the notions of presentational and pragmatic sense can be seen to highlight factors that quite literally structure both prepredicative abilities and the predicative abilities which build on these. In this respect, although by definition the Background is not a fully formed ('explicit') anticipation of intentionality, the notions of presentational and pragmatic sense tell us something about the way it is structured.

Having in previous chapters argued that the notions of presentational and pragmatic sense are motivated by considerations of phenomenological adequacy, this section has shown how the need arises within the semantics approach for the kind of account the phenomenological approach provides, and how the functional foundation claim can be accommodated by the semantics approach as a partial theory of sense explicating specifically linguistic aspects of Background.

Even if all this is acknowledged, the importance of the phenomenological approach and the prepredicative factors on which it focuses might be challenged. Searle (1983, 143) himself describes the Background as 'bedrock', a Wittgensteinian metaphor (*PU* §217) suggesting that our understanding of what concepts are and how they function rests upon an impenetrable basis that imposes a principled limit on such enquiry – i.e. that there is 'no digging deeper'. This metaphor implies that the semantics approach captures everything of philosophical interest about linguistic meaning. This thought might be defended in two ways. First by suggesting that the semantic approach is functionally autonomous and classifying the role of prepredicative factors as 'causal conditioning'. While allowing that prepredicative factors (causally) underlie semantic facts, this assumes that semantic characterizations

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<sup>337</sup> As reflected in the relationship between rule-exemplification rule-stating discussed above (see pages 176 and 183 above). – Incidentally, on Searle's account, consciousness of satisfaction conditions does not entail predicative ('explicit') awareness of these conditions and can be manifested in ('implicit') sensitivity to correctness of use. Perhaps due to his unorthodox use of the term 'representation' – on which such sensitivity is 'representational' in the sense of having conditions of success – Searle's claims have been misinterpreted as concerning the phenomenology of action and failing to do justice to 'skilled coping' (Wakefield/Dreyfus 1991; Dreyfus 1999). He forcefully and convincingly clarifies his position in Searle 2000.

are structurally independent of causal accounts. The second is to claim that prepredicative factors can be reduced to semantic terms. Thus if the two approaches are homologous, with every feature of prepredicative functioning having a correlate in the semantic approach, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the former can be understood fully in terms of the latter, so that the semantics approach provides a functionally complete picture of language. If either of these defences succeed, what was previously described as a *weak* functional foundational claim would result: while acknowledging that prepredicative factors (in some way) underlie semantic properties, this denies that the explanatory adequacy of the semantics approach is in any way compromised. The suspicion expressed in the bedrock metaphor is thus that, even if the weak foundational claim is true, it is too anodyne to be of philosophical interest: Background is background, and rightly not the focus of philosophical attention.

The next section will argue that the two arguments just mentioned do not stand up, and that a stronger claim can be made on behalf of the phenomenological approach. However, it is perhaps worth emphasizing that, even if the weak version of the functional foundation claim were correct, a phenomenological account of Background factors would still – as outlined in this section – have a role to play in semantics-centred conception of language and would form part of a complete (philosophical) understanding of what is involved in intentionality and propositional meaning.

### **3. The claims of prepredicative foundation**

A feature distinguishing Heidegger's view of the prepredicative is the idea of *heterologous foundation*, the founding of predicative judgements in something differing in its functional nature and so not to be understood in terms of predication.<sup>338</sup> This feature suggests that a somewhat stronger claim should be made concerning the foundational role of prepredicative factors in relation to semantic properties. The basis of what I shall call a *moderate* (functional) foundation claim is hence that the semantics and phenomenological approaches identify different processes – so to speak, different 'mechanisms' – of conceptual articulation, such that an understanding of prepredicative factors is necessarily part of a philosophically

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<sup>338</sup> Cf. page 48 above.

adequate conception of language. For this to be the case, two conditions need to be fulfilled. First, the prepredicative and semantics approaches must differ in their functional topology, i.e. identify factors that function in significantly different ways, so that there is no 1:1 mapping between them. Despite this, second, the factors identified by the prepredicative approach must be semantically relevant. That is, to avoid being dismissed as semantically inert, so that semantic relationships could be considered explanatorily closed, prepredicative factors need to be seen to have some role in the formation of semantic content. If either of these conditions are not fulfilled – i.e. if either semantic and prepredicative functioning corresponded perfectly, or prepredicative factors were not relevant to semantics – it would be reasonable to think of their relationship in terms of weak foundation, so that semantics tells us everything a philosopher might want to know about the way language works.

The second condition is, I suggest, straightforwardly met. For in describing factors involved in the actual phenomena in which linguistic articulation occurs, pragmatic and presentational sense pertain directly to the formation of concepts and hence to the meaningful use of language. The basis of this claim (as argued in the preceding two chapters) is phenomenological adequacy – so that these descriptions are more reminders than discoveries, acknowledging that the functioning of language lies open to inspection. It has also been indicated how both pragmatic and presentational sense can be exploited in predicative contexts, and so shape inferential properties. In this way they exhibit a key characteristic of Searle's Background, the whole point of which is to allow that nonrepresentational abilities generate propositionally expressible commitments.<sup>339</sup> Indeed, an important advantage of distinguishing the notions of presentational and pragmatic sense, linked with the form of signs and the form of practice respectively, is to reflect the involvement of formative processes in semantic content, rather than presenting the latter as a functionally independent superstructure.

The key question therefore relates to the first condition: What basis is there for thinking that the phenomenological and semantics approaches identify different functional topologies? In my initial discussion of how claims about prepredicative

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<sup>339</sup> As Searle explains, a 'crucial step in understanding the Background is to see that one can be committed to the truth of a proposition without having any intentional state whatever with that proposition as content'. Such commitments are typically practical, such that to deny certain propositions (e.g. that objects are solid) would be contradicted by, i.e. inconsistent with, one's actions (Searle 1992, 185).

factors are to be interpreted it was suggested that one feature distinguishing these from propositional truth is that their appropriateness or otherwise need not be thought of as functioning in the bivalent manner characteristic of propositional truth.<sup>340</sup> I now want to expand on this by suggesting three ways in which presentational and pragmatic sense, as meanwhile described, differ in their functional topology from semantic content.

(a) *Basis of structuration*: The first difference lies in the features taken to underlie linguistic articulation, which I shall call the basis of structuration. According to the views developed here, both presentational and pragmatic sense reflect structural influences on language. In the case of pragmatic sense the internal link between practice and language highlighted by Wittgenstein means language is structured by language-games, the form of which determines both the degree of differentiation required and which aspects of the world need to be marked linguistically. In the case of presentational sense, the lexical and sublexical structure of language is used to map the world in a typological or schematic way. And while the phonetic basis of linguistic signs is ultimately arbitrary – there is no temptation here, as perhaps there is with pictures, to suppose natural resemblance – through iterative use the system of signs develops in nonarbitrary ways, acquiring intelligibility as a system of relatively motivated features.<sup>341</sup> Being simultaneously the result of such processes and an operative factor involved in the ongoing evolution of language, the morphological array of linguistic signs is part of the basis of language's structuration. By contrast the basis of structuration for the semantics approach lies in the inferential or truth-preserving role of words in sentential contexts, which identifies semantic elements and rules for their combination. These different bases of structuration – expressed in Heidegger's talk of a change in 'as-structure' – underlie familiar discrepancies, often dealt with, somewhat tendentiously, by distinguishing 'deep' semantic from 'surface' grammatical structure.<sup>342</sup> Not only do the words individuated in practice differ from the 'semantic structure' of a language – perhaps motivating the thought that real languages fail to exhibit their logical form adequately in the way a philosophically 'ideal' language would. Rather, with the involvement of sublexical form, the question

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<sup>340</sup> Cf. page 49 above.

<sup>341</sup> Cf. II.4.(ii) above.

<sup>342</sup> In other words, far from being an innovation, this difference in functional topology is the very feature sometimes thought to show up the need for semantic analysis to eliminate the supposed refractory effect of language's syntactic and practical formation.

of the sign system's morphological form corresponding to the basic structures identified by the semantics approach can hardly arise.

(b) *Non-discreteness*: The second way the functional topologies differ concerns the question of discreteness. A central assumption of the semantics approach is its modelling of propositional and conceptual operations as discrete functions, usually bivalent ones such as the truth or falsity of propositional contents or the satisfaction or nonsatisfaction of predicates. This tidy picture of discrete and determinate content 'valencies' contrasts with both presentational and pragmatic sense. Presentational sense is nondiscrete due to the semantic openness of linguistic expressions, i.e. the fact that they are constantly open to extended or new uses. Such openness is characterized by continuous variability rather than a fixed number of values – not least because the difference between simply extending the use of term and a new use will often be marginal. Similarly with regard to pragmatic sense: Drawing on Wittgenstein's later work, I have here suggested that an ideal-free conception of the rules inherent in linguistic practices should be generally understood as having the form of empirical or statistical rules, i.e. as characterized by greater or lesser variation about a mean. On this picture the notion of falling under, or complying with, a rule is itself not sharp: Although there will be clear cases of both falling under and not falling under such a rule, there will also be grey areas of transition between the two, so that pragmatic sense too is best thought of in terms of continuous variability rather than a fixed number of values, as continuously rather than discretely articulated.

To some extent the 'non-discreteness' of prepredicative sense merely corresponds to idea of concepts' 'vagueness'. However, non-discreteness should not be thought of as a peripheral effect that allows bivalency to be thought of as the default mode of linguistic meaning's functioning. For while bivalency is a plausible approximation in strictly regulated language-games, the fact that both presentational and pragmatic feats of language are characterized by openness and non-discreteness suggests that this is the more general topology of linguistic meaning. A second, somewhat deeper consideration leads to the same conclusion: Because predicate calculus models the functioning of language in terms of determinately falling under a predicate, being true or otherwise, to think of bivalency as the *basic* mode of conceptual operation presupposes an idealized fully determinate picture. Yet it is relinquishing the idea of full determinacy, which is shown to be inherently unstable

by Wittgenstein's critique of the calculus notion of rules, that leads the phenomenological approach to its emphasis on the openness and non-discreteness of linguistic functioning. Whereas the first consideration of generality suggests that to think of language as functioning bivalently would be an approximation at best, the second shows that it would be fundamentally misleading. Either way to think of conceptual functioning as basically bivalent is to attempt, so to speak, to put round pegs into square holes.

(c) *Language as acquisitional*: The phenomenological approach also differs from the semantic approach in recognizing the acquisitional character of language as an essential aspect of the way it functions. To talk of language as an acquisition – as Merleau-Ponty, adopting Husserl's use, characteristically does – clearly suggests it is something built up over time, which humans have come to possess through processes of discovery or invention. This is most directly seen in the way meaningful use becomes sedimented in the morphology of the system of linguistic signs. The phenomenological view accommodates this fact by seeing the presentational sense of words – due to their place in the differential framework of language and the relative motivations pervading it – as inscribed in the forms of the lexical system. This acquisitional view not only coheres with both the Wittgensteinian idea of language as an institution or custom and Heidegger's emphasis on the historicity of disclosure, but better does justice than either to the temporality of language. For by viewing lexical items as type artefacts, characterized by an iteratively evolved situated interpretability, this view also explains the ongoing relevance of etymology to word meanings.<sup>343</sup>

The significance of this acquisitional aspect can be brought out by considering the obvious objection that *at any given time* (and perhaps relativized to certain speakers) a language is in principle representable as instantiating a synchronous system of rules. This objection amounts to the suggestion that language can be detemporalized, i.e. considered as functioning in a time-independent manner. This is not obviously a coherent suggestion. For it seems to ignore the fundamental fact, emphasized by Wittgenstein, that the concept of a rule makes sense only against the backdrop of repeated use. Yet, even if coherent, it assumes that the complex means of differentiation provided by a lexical system and its established patterns of use are

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<sup>343</sup> Cf. II.4.(ii) and page 131 f. above.

independent of their history. This idea no doubt draws plausibility from the fact that we often learn and explain the use of linguistic terms without any mention of historical facts. It nonetheless fails to take account of the fact that as a whole the techniques embodied in language use are the product of a complex evolution and are no more possible without a development history than the abilities to travel to the moon or build a computer. By contrast, the fact that the functional economy of natural language is intrinsically temporal is built into the phenomenological view's acquisitional picture of language. In Heideggerian terminology (cf. *SZ* 329), this view acknowledges that language is temporally ecstatic, standing-out-of-itself in the sense of always being having been shaped by its own past and comprising a particular present that conditions its future disclosive possibilities.

Both conditions identified above are therefore met: Having previously clarified that pragmatic and presentational sense cannot be dismissed as semantically irrelevant, the three factors just described show that presentational and pragmatic sense function in ways identifiably different from semantic content, so that the phenomenological approach does not map straightforwardly (in a 1:1 manner) onto the semantics approach. Whereas the first condition prevents thinking of semantics as structurally or functionally independent of presentational and pragmatic sense, the second blocks the idea that presentational and pragmatic sense can be reduced to semantic equivalents. This rules out the weak functional foundation claim, which views the semantics approach as capturing everything of philosophical interest about the functioning of language. The relationship between the two approaches should instead be thought of as heterologous foundation, according to which the prepredicative Background of semantic content has structure that is (a) not directly accountable for in semantic terms, but which (b) cannot be considered functionally irrelevant to meaning, and (c) can be understood in phenomenological terms as presentational and pragmatic sense. This amounts to what I have called a moderate functional foundation claim, which not only acknowledges that prepredicative factors (e.g. causally) underlie the semantics approach, but also recognizes that they add something of functional significance to the latter.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> And which also differs from the strong foundational claim discussed above in not claiming that the semantics approach adds nothing of importance to the phenomenological approach.

In claiming to differ in kind from and/or challenge the primacy of propositional or conceptual content the conceptions of presentational and pragmatic sense proposed here are similar to – and indeed have already been respectively likened to – the ideas of nonconceptual content and knowing-how. It is common to object to such ideas that they fail to identify anything not captured by what I have here called the semantics approach, so that in principle they remain reducible to propositional/conceptual content. To assess the soundness of the moderate functional foundation claim being made here, it therefore seems appropriate to address two kinds of objection made to the ideas of nonconceptual content and knowing-how.

The first kind of objection is that the respective notion is conceptually dependent on, and hence not genuinely opposed to, those of propositional or conceptual content. This charge might be levelled at the idea of ‘nonconceptual content’ that is sometimes appealed to in philosophy of mind to make space for the claim that a state or action can have content without an agent’s being ‘explicitly’ aware of it. Adrian Cussins, for example, distinguishes between conceptual content, defined in terms of ‘objects, properties, or situations’ as determinants of truth conditions, and nonconceptual content, which is to be ‘canonically specified by means of concepts that the subject need not have’.<sup>345</sup> The problem with relying on ‘canonical specification’ in this way is that it prompts the question as to what is nonconceptual about the *content* concerned. Both conceptual and nonconceptual content, on this account, are defined conceptually. The difference between the two cases turns not on the kind of content involved, but the way content is available to an agent’s consciousness. Thus it seems that the content of a nonconceptual state can be understood only in conceptual terms, rendering the expression ‘nonconceptual content’ oxymoronic and so misleading at the very least. Parallel objections are often made to the proposed distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that. The problem arises because knowing-how must be something cognitive, since knowing how to  $\Phi$  cannot be equated with actually being able to  $\Phi$  – since, for example, someone with a broken leg might know how to, but be unable to swim. And yet it seems that whatever it is that a person *P* knows in knowing how to  $\Phi$  must be statable in the form ‘*P* knows that ...’. However, this would mean that knowing-how is to be

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<sup>345</sup> Cussins 2003, 138. The same strategy is endorsed by Peacocke (1992, 61-98) and Crane (1992). As an example of nonconceptual content Cussins (2003, 150) cites skilled performances, such as knowing how fast one is riding a motorbike.



understood, against its original intention, in terms of propositional knowing-that.<sup>346</sup> Hence it seems not only that reductive strategies to the latter are possible, but that the only way of specifying what the nonconceptual or nonpropositional amount to is in terms of conceptual and propositional content respectively.

It might be thought that the ideas of presentational and pragmatic sense are susceptible to the same kind of objection, such that one can only understand what it is for these to be about ‘meaning’ via the semantic notion of propositional/conceptual content.<sup>347</sup> The fact that the ideas of presentational and pragmatic sense can be – as in the preceding chapters – characterized without the technical terminology of semantics already indicates that this is not the case.<sup>348</sup> This conclusion is supported by reconsidering the conceptual-dependence objection to nonconceptual content and knowing-how. In each case the underlying problem is that the feature in question is not characterized in a way that makes apparent how it differs structurally from its intended conceptual/propositional counterpart. By contrast, the importance of the preceding three features is to make clear how presentational and pragmatic sense differ in their structure, or functional character, from the notions of propositional/conceptual content. These differences in functional topology – i.e. the basis of structuration, (non)discreteness, and acquisitional character – mean that presentational and pragmatic sense cannot be thought of as mapping in a 1:1 manner onto propositional/conceptual content.<sup>349</sup> It would therefore be mistaken to think of the former as reducible to, or even definable in terms of the latter, so that it is difficult to see how presentational and pragmatic sense could be thought of as conceptually dependent on the notions of propositional/conceptual content.

The second kind of objection to the ideas of nonconceptual content and knowing-how is that even supposed structural differences do not suffice to prevent their assimilation to propositional/conceptual content. An example of this kind of

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<sup>346</sup> For a sophisticated defence of this idea, see Stanley/Williamson 2001. Similarly directed arguments against the knowing-how/knowing-that distinction are offered by Snowdon 2003. – Incidentally, I am not suggesting that nonconceptual content stands in the same relation to conceptual content as knowing-how does to knowing-that; the thought is merely that the characterizations of the nonconceptual and knowing-how share an analogous lack of independence.

<sup>347</sup> Harrison (1975) argues in this spirit that Husserl’s conception of prepredicative experience is structurally dependent on predicative determinations. Whether or not this applies to Husserl’s conception, I argue here that it is not a general problem of claims about the prepredicative.

<sup>348</sup> A somewhat dogmatic response would be that this means one is still ‘owed an account’ of them in semantic terms. However, in revealing antecedent commitment to the semantics approach, this would beg the current question of the relationship between semantic content and prepredicative sense.

<sup>349</sup> In the terms used here, the conceptual-dependency objection assumes a relationship of homologous foundation, whereas these differences show it to be a heterologous foundation.

objection is John McDowell's argument against Gareth Evans's attribution of a basic epistemological role to 'informational states' that embody a kind of nonconceptual representational content. Central to Evans's view is the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content: whereas conceptual content is linked with the role of states in judgement, and characterized in terms of reasons and concepts, nonconceptual (information) content is to be instantiated by the structure of perceptual states and due to causal interaction with the environment (cf. Evans 1982, 122-9). The two kinds of content are to be linked by the possibility of 'conceptualization' through which nonconceptual content is taken up into conceptual content, thus entering into conscious experience and becoming 'available to' judgement (Evans 1982, 227, 157 f.).

Evans's position is clearly analogous to the functional foundational claim under consideration here: the nonconceptual-conceptual distinction parallels the prepredicative-predicative distinction, just as the idea of 'conceptualization' does Heidegger's talk of a 'modification' of the hermeneutic-as of circumspection into the apophantic-as of judgement. Particularly relevant is the suggestion that nonconceptual content is distinguished from conceptual content by being more fine-grained. Thus Evans (1982, 229) suggests that subjects are able to discriminate, for example, more shades of colour than there are conceptual means to represent such discriminations. Such an appeal to 'finesse of grain' avoids the underlying problem mentioned above by offering a characterization of the structure of nonconceptual states that is not only independent of the articulation of conceptual content, but also intimates how these structures might differ. The relevance of this proposal here is that appealing to fineness of grain to block an assimilation of nonconceptual to conceptual content parallels my claim that differences in functional topology – particularly their bases of structuration and (non)discreteness – prevent presentational and pragmatic sense being assimilated to propositional/conceptual content.

McDowell aims to establish, against Evans, that the idea of nonconceptual content is chimerical and that all content is conceptual – or, as he often puts it, is in the 'space of reasons'. To this end he offers an argument intended to show that fineness of grain cannot be used to distinguish nonconceptual content, which, if successful, might be thought to block the foundation claim being made here based on differences in functional topology. Thus in the case of colour sensitivity McDowell argues that, if one genuinely has the ability to recognize a certain colour over an

extended period, ‘the conceptual content of such a recognitional capacity can be made explicit with the help of a sample’ and referred to by ‘a phrase like “that shade”, in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample’ (McDowell 1996, 57). Generalizing somewhat, the argument is that the use of determinable and demonstrative concepts in combination with recognitional capacities suffices to ensure that fineness of grain does not succeed in distinguishing something as nonconceptual. Rather, according to McDowell, by such means any discernible differences are ‘conceptual in the sense that they are rationally integrated into spontaneity at large’ (McDowell 1996, 58). The central feature of such integration is the availability of the contents of experience for use in judgements: ‘genuinely conceptual capacities [...] can also be exploited in active judgements’ such that ‘appearances can constitute reasons for judgments’ (McDowell 1996, 62).

It should be noted in passing that both McDowell’s and Evans’s interest differs from that here in centring on the nature of *experience* and the psychological or mental constitution of subjects, rather than on the structural factors making up public linguistic phenomena. The relevance of McDowell’s argument lies in the suggestion that context-sensitive conceptual means could be used to map (presumably) any manifold onto the conceptual realm and that this suffices to consider those manifolds to be conceptually structured. If this line of argument were successful, it would suggest that differences in what I have called ‘functional topology’ do not prevent presentational and pragmatic sense being understood in the semantics approach’s terms, so that the moderate foundational claim would collapse into the weak claim.

The problem with McDowell’s argument, however, is that it is difficult to see anything that Evans need disagree with, and hence how it counts against the latter’s claims. Evans could no doubt agree with McDowell that any feature of nonconceptual content might be ‘exploited in active judgements’. The difference between their positions turns on what it is to be available for such exploitation: for Evans this requires a ‘conceptualization’ of intrinsically nonconceptual content, whereas for McDowell content is intrinsically conceptual. But the scenario McDowell describes can equally well be seen as both fully compatible with Evans’s point about fineness of grain and as partially explicating the process of conceptualization – as a process in which the use of indexicals and determinable concepts yields ad hoc conceptual abilities. Of course it is true that the use of samples could be standardized, perhaps genuinely extending the range of established conceptual means – though in practice it

is difficult to see this being done without a corresponding notation (think of the names on Dulux colour charts) that obviates the need for the use of indexicals. However, in the absence of standardized means for referring to fine colour gradations, one might plausibly rely on ad hoc solutions of the kind McDowell describes. But, rather than establishing that a fine-grained information manifold is intrinsically conceptual, this shows merely that the use of relatively coarse, context-dependent expressions suffices to introduce any discernible difference into language-games that involve the giving and taking of reasons. And this can, in Evans's spirit, be understood as the use of these means to 'conceptualize' fine-grained information differences.

McDowell's argument thus neither provides reason to think of fine-structured information states as being actually rather than potentially conceptual, nor does anything to rule out Evans's claim that informational states require conceptualization. The relevance of this result here is that McDowell's line of argument fails to establish that the use of context-sensitive conceptual means renders whatever they refer to conceptual in character. Similarly, the fact that prepredicative factors can be exploited in semantically relevant ways cannot be taken to imply that such factors can be assimilated, reduced to, or equated with semantic properties.

The two objections just considered – namely that the concept of prepredicative sense is conceptually dependent on propositional/conceptual content, and that differences in functional topology would not suffice to rule out assimilation of prepredicative sense to propositional/conceptual content – do not therefore succeed in undermining the moderate functional foundation claim. The point of this claim is effectively that to explicate the workings of the founding Background is not otiose. To some extent this already followed from the weak foundation claim, but there the philosophical interest of such explication was simply a matter of completeness, since Background was taken to contribute nothing distinctive to linguistic meaning. Against this, the message of the moderate foundational claim is that a phenomenological account of Background, of the kind offered here, tells us something distinctive about the functioning of language that is not covered by the semantics approach. To understand the significance of this claim, it will be helpful to consider – in three steps – an analogy with the change brought to classical physics by the development of atomic physics in the course of the 20th century. As the terminology testifies, it was assumed

in classical physics that elements or atoms were indivisible basic constituents of the physical world, in much the same way as the semantics approach often assumes there to be basic units of meaning. The realization that the atom could be split, leading to the development of complex models of the subatomic, clearly made a great difference to our understanding of both physical matter and the status of classical physics' theories. So what, in very general terms, was the nature of this difference? And how does this shed light on the relationship between semantics and the prepredicative?

First, it became clear that classical physics could not claim to be a comprehensive theory of matter and that an understanding of the subatomic realm would be part of any such theory. Similarly, any ambition the semantics approach might have to deliver a comprehensive theory of linguistic meaning is undermined by the vindication of the moderate functional foundation claim. For this implies that understanding how linguistic meaning functions requires an account of the prepredicative factors in which semantic properties are founded. To insist otherwise would be like suggesting that classical physics had nothing to learn from an understanding of the subatomic. This is a significant result. To begin with, it highlights that it is misleading to think of semantics as a closed or self-sufficient functionality. Semantics is not 'autonomous' and such supposed closure cannot justify reassuring dualisms – e.g. language/world, semantics/causal, space of reasons/space of nature – that philosophers of language sometimes rely on to delimit their subject matter. Interpretation of the philosophical importance of semantics should instead reflect the fact that linguistic meaning is not only ontologically, but also functionally embedded in the world. In addition, it highlights that the phenomenon of language should not be overrationalized. A characteristic feature of the semantics approach is the attempt to model language as a pervasively rational phenomenon, as instantiating a system of determinate rules that circumscribe – as the common metaphors have it – our conceptual 'mechanisms' or 'machinery'. Of course, this is simply a contemporary incarnation of the age old belief that language use distinguishes humans as rational. But even allowing that language *is* the vehicle of predicative competence, and as such makes rationality of the predicative type possible, does not mean that language should or can be thought of as functioning

homogeneously in a pervasively rational manner.<sup>350</sup> In identifying the formative, foundational role of prepredicative factors, the phenomenological approach serves as a reminder against such convenient oversimplifications. As the preceding discussions of presentational and pragmatic sense should have made clear, prepredicative factors have a kind of intermediate status between the straightforwardly mechanical-causal and full rationality. Although formed by intelligent behaviour, they are not assimilable to the semantics approach's preferred model of what it is to be rational; they are instead inchoately rational, rationally ambivalent, or the product of unreflective pragmatic agency.<sup>351</sup>

Faced with these claims, second, a defendant of the semantics approach might respond that it is intended in the spirit of a scientific hypothesis, as the best available model of, and a good approximation to, how language works. The analogy with physics gives this suggestion some plausibility: after all, macroscopic physics did not become obsolete with the discovery of subatomic properties; rather it remained useful despite being strictly speaking 'false'. Nonetheless, the suggestion is unsatisfactory. Apart from the fact that it seems somewhat inaccurate to describe (philosophical) semantics as an empirical field of enquiry, an appeal to the idea of approximation is problematic. With scientific theories the claim to be an approximation can be justified – either quantitatively, by being purpose-relative, or both – and it is usual to consider and explicate constraints on a theory's applicability. It is true that semantics *is* a good approximation in the context of what I have called strictly regulated language-games, those in which most word-use patterns are covered by well defined rules. But the semantics approach itself is oblivious to – i.e. does not factor in or explicate – the circumstances that regulate its applicability. This means that to assume that semantics generally approximates well to linguistic phenomena lacks justification, resting instead on the prejudgement (or 'intuition') that language just is rule-governed, determinate, and fundamentally bivalent in its operation. Yet this obliviousness leaves intact the suspicion that the semantics approach is characterized by omissions

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<sup>350</sup> As even Leibniz (1982, 8 [§5]), in one of his more down-to-earth moments, puts it, 'les hommes en tant qu'ils sont empiriques, c'est à dire dans les trois quarts de leurs actions, n'agissent que comme des bêtes'.

<sup>351</sup> This should not, incidentally, be seen as undermining or endangering the notion of rationality. Rather this intermediate status is an indication of how higher-level rational feats are functionally integrated with and properly anchored in the actual world. It is the functional aspect of viewing language as embedded in the world.

that are principled, and which lead it to misrepresent the way linguistic articulation actually works.

Despite this, finally, the analogy with physics provides a model for thinking of how the phenomenological and semantics approaches are complementary. Classical physics does not ‘approximate’ to subatomic physics, but models different aspects of the behaviour of matter, behaviour exhibited at a different level, due either to statistical aggregation or the fact that atoms, for example, have (emergent) properties in virtue of their organization as a whole that might not be predicted on the basis of the properties of their parts. So the development of subatomic physics quite literally took understanding (of matter) to a new level. It was discovered that the subatomic functioned in ways not evident from the top-down macroscopic perspective of classical physics, yielding an explanatory gain by explaining and predicting phenomena that were beyond the scope of classical physics. At the same time such insights did nothing to impair the reliability or validity of most macroscopic theories provided their level and range of applicability is respected. I want to suggest that the phenomenological and semantics approaches complement each other in an analogous way. They do not correspond to one another in a straightforward, homologous manner – so to speak, telling the same story from different perspectives. Rather, due to their heterologous relationship, their complementarity is such that they model different (mutually irreducible) aspects of the phenomenon of linguistic meaning. A phenomenological account of prepredicative factors should accordingly be seen as taking understanding of language to a new level, enabling understanding of phenomena that are beyond the pale of the semantics approach.<sup>352</sup>

#### **4. Linguistic contact with the world**

The principal motivation for philosophical interest in language is no doubt to understand its relevance to knowledge, i.e. not simply to articulate what it is to have a grasp of language, but also what it is we grasp about the world in using language. The following two sections aim to assess whether the phenomenological conception of language developed in the previous chapters should be seen as having realist or nonrealist implications. This section begins by suggesting how the issue seems to

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<sup>352</sup> It is, of course, possible that a later theory might, again as in physics, succeed in unifying two such theories. But in the absence of such an overarching perspective the explanatory value of each should be acknowledged.

arise. Given my general commitment to a Heideggerian framework, *SZ*'s nondualist treatment of realism and idealism is then reviewed, as a necessary prelude, before moving on to address the current position's implications. Against this background, the next section seeks to locate the present view in relation to other realist or nonrealist positions, arguing that rather than falling on one side of this familiar contrast its virtue is to steer a middle path between the two.

A useful starting point is provided by the position Putnam calls 'metaphysical realism', characterized by the following three theses: 'the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of "the way the world is". Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things' (Putnam 1981, 49). Faced with this characterization, there are *prima facie* grounds for supposing the phenomenological conception of language developed here challenges realism. To begin with, my emphasis on the 'involvement' of words in the formation of propositional content seems to challenge the mind-independence, or as I shall put it *access-independence*, of objects. The challenge is not, of course, whether or not objects can generally be thought of as existing independently of thought or language. Even if one thinks that a basic subject-object dualism allows scepticism about the 'external' physical world's existence, the latter is presupposed in the public phenomenon of language. There are of course, many things that would not exist without language – not just promises, say, but many things produced in language-games. Equally, there are many entities that would exist as they do without being referred to by language, not just mountains etc., but even words themselves. So to claim generally that objects 'exist' only as referred to by language would simply be confused. The concern is rather with the sense attaching to the word 'object' in knowledge 'of objects', i.e. whether this means objects-as-represented or objects-as-they-are-in-themselves, or in Kant's terms 'appearances' or 'things-in-themselves'. The challenge is therefore that emphasizing the involvement of words suggests that (at least insofar as knowledge is linked with the representation of thoughts in language) objects can be spoken of only as conditioned in the ways described by presentational and pragmatic sense – as objects-for-us or Kantian representations. A second challenge is suggested by my rejection of an ideal of final determinacy and insistence on the constitutive openness of language's functioning. For this opposes the metaphysical realist's underlying assumption that the world can be thought of as a



‘fixed totality of objects’, since if there were some such totality it would presumably serve as a standard of ultimate determinacy towards which description of the world should tend.

One striking feature of Putnam’s description of metaphysical realism is that what ‘words or thought-signs’ are accountable to is characterized in an explicitly dualist manner as ‘mind-independent objects’. This naturally evokes the traditionally familiar picture – found, for example, in Descartes, British Empiricism and Kant – of a fundamental subject-object opposition and the corresponding inside-outside imagery. Given this basic picture, the poignancy of the realism/idealism issue is easily appreciated, since knowledge is then bound to depend on the relationship between internal representations and external objects, and the two extremes of confinement within representation and cognitively reaching out to external reality. One of Heidegger’s principal aims, however, was to overcome this basic picture of humans’ epistemological situation. So having likened a phenomenological conception of language-in-the-world to Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, a prudent and instructive first step in assessing its realist/nonrealist implications will be to consider the approach *SZ* takes to the realism/idealism issue.

By the time Heidegger discusses what he calls the ‘reality problem’ in §43 of *SZ* it comes as little surprise that his treatment of this problem has two distinctive features. The first is that he cursorily and polemically dismisses the Cartesian questions of whether ‘consciousness-transcendent’ entities exist and whether this can be proven as making no sense (being ‘ohne Sinn’) and claims that the real ‘scandal of philosophy’ – borrowing Kant’s phrase – is that such proofs are demanded (cf. *SZ* 202, 205). The argumentative basis of this claim, explored in the preceding sections of *SZ*, is Heidegger’s conviction that the existence of ‘external’ objects is implicit in the disclosedness that Dasein is, such that this is a condition of possibility for the question of their existence to be asked.<sup>353</sup> And although it might be disputed that to question the external world’s existence makes no sense, Heidegger’s underlying point is that this would require explicit defence of the ontological assumptions – about what it is to be a subject or object – on which these questions are based. Nevertheless, for

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<sup>353</sup> *SZ* 202, 205. – Indeed Heidegger’s approach in *SZ* is quite Cartesian, since consideration of what asking philosophical questions presupposes was the starting point (§2) – the *quaeritur* in place of Descartes’ *cogito* – and might be seen as motivating *SZ*’s ‘preparatory’ analysis of Dasein.

the present purposes it suffices to note that rejecting the traditional Cartesian framing of the realism/idealism issue is central to Heidegger's position.

The second distinctive feature of Heidegger's treatment of the 'reality problem' is his unorthodox construal of what this problem is. Underlying this is his fundamental objection that both realist and idealist strands of modern philosophy lack requisite ontological understanding in failing to explicate what it is for the things they presuppose to exist. Realism suffers from a 'lack of ontological understanding', Heidegger charges, since 'adequate ontological analysis of reality' depends on the extent to which 'that *from which* independence is to exist [*bestehen*], *what* is to be transcended, is *itself* clarified with respect to its *being*'.<sup>354</sup> Similarly, while recognizing that 'reality is possible only in understanding of being', idealism still stands in need of 'ontological analysis of consciousness itself' to understand what it is to be real (SZ 207). While these formulations betray Heidegger's conviction that idealism is the philosophically superior position, his objections are intended to apply quite generally to setting up philosophical problems via an inside-outside (or subject-object) opposition.<sup>355</sup> For, as his preceding analytic of Dasein makes clear, Heidegger believes that attempting to spell out the ontological assumptions on which such a distinction is predicated would reveal the untenability of this basic picture and its 'demolition of the original phenomenon of being-in-the-world'.<sup>356</sup>

This is the background for Heidegger's unorthodox construal of the 'reality problem'. Crucially, Heidegger takes the term 'reality' (*Realität*) to refer to 'nothing other' than what he has otherwise called '*Vorhandenheit*' – i.e. Thingness or presentness-at-hand.<sup>357</sup> With this stipulation in place, the 'reality problem' is no longer whether objects exist (whether Things have being), but instead becomes that of how Things feature in understanding of Being. And the answer to *this* problem, already provided by Heidegger's analytic of Dasein, is that 'objective reality' is founded in Handiness, the being of entities in the purposive perspective of Dasein's concerns. Thus, as Heidegger understands it, the 'reality problem' is about the relationship between entities accessed or individuated in different ways (the

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<sup>354</sup> SZ 207, 202. – This charge seems fairly directed at the customary (e.g. Putnam's) talk of 'mind-independent objects'.

<sup>355</sup> SZ 205. See also both the introduction and I.2.(i) above.

<sup>356</sup> SZ 206. See in particular §43b, which takes the resistance of 'innerworldly' entities as a phenomenon that, when properly understood, leads beyond the picture of an immanent mind opposed by transcendent objects.

<sup>357</sup> SZ 209 (i.e. 'das Sein des innerweltlich *vorhandenen* Seienden (res)').

perspectives of purpose and properties respectively). And this, on his nondualist picture, is a relationship between two ways of being in genuine contact with the envioning world, or two ways of being ‘in the truth’ (SZ 221).

This position aims to reconcile idealist and realist inclinations by allowing to idealism that objects of knowing are access-condition relative, while denying – in realist spirit – that this means any break with how things are ‘in themselves’. This attempted reconciliation is expressed, perhaps awkwardly, in Heidegger’s talk of the ‘dependency of being, [but] not of what is, on understanding of being’, or ‘the dependency of reality, [but] not of the real, on Concern’.<sup>358</sup> What this aims to express, I suggest, is that while the features of the world we refer to intentionally (at least often) exist independently of our referring to them, what it is to be an entity can be understood only in relation to some mode of access – ultimately to a ‘primary kind of access’ (cf. SZ 202) – and a concomitant perspective of as-ness or individuation.

I want here to emphasize two important implications of Heidegger’s treatment of the reality problem. The first, just hinted at, is that the dualist distinction of ‘for us’ and ‘in themselves’ collapses into an access-condition-relative notion of entities (e.g. Handiness, Thingness).<sup>359</sup> This thought, in particular the notion of ‘access’ (*Zugang*) it involves, requires some clarification. To begin with, such talk of ‘access’ is clearly not supposed to suggest that Dasein could be altogether out of touch with, or lack access to, the surrounding world. Further, part of the point in talking of ‘access’ is to avoid reference to a psychological notion of mindedness by generally linking the relateness of entities’ ‘being’ to an ‘understanding of being’. It might, however, be wondered how this accommodates natural objects, which are putatively individuated in ‘access’-independent, say spatio-temporal, terms: Isn’t one forced to admit that the individuation of rocks, atoms etc. is no more ‘access’ dependent than it is ‘mind’ dependent? I suggest it is crucial to realize that when Heidegger refers to an ‘understanding of being’ he means an understanding in which what exists (*das Seiende*) is grasped as comprising distinct entities (*Seiendes qua Zuhandenes* or *Vorhandenes*), i.e. as having had some kind of ‘as-ness’ imposed on it. Yet, if they correspond to the individuation of what exists into distinct entities, Heidegger’s

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<sup>358</sup> SZ 212, cf. 230, where being [*Sein*] but not what is [*Seiendes*] is linked to Dasein’s existence.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. the emphasis at SZ 71 that *Zuhandenheit*, for example, does not simply refer to the way an entity is grasped. – It is true that Heidegger toys with the idea that Handiness [*Zuhandenheit*] is the ‘in-itselfness’ [*Ansichsein*] of entities (SZ 75). But, whatever is made of this suggestion, the claim is certainly not that it stands in opposition to the idea of being ‘for us’.

modes of 'access' can be glossed as 'perspectives of individuation' or simply 'individuation conditions'. Although it might initially appear somewhat generous, this construal of Heidegger's terms can be justified. For to know how something is individuated is to know how, at least in principle, to access it; conversely, to know how to access something requires knowing, at least in part, how it is individuated. This interpretation has no trouble accommodating natural objects, as it requires only that these be understood in relation to some (e.g. spatio-temporal) optic of individuation. Indeed it has the advantage of making the idea of access-dependence compellingly tautological, since all this then means is that the concept of an object is necessarily related to some mode of individuation. Accordingly, to deny the intelligibility of entities without access conditions, i.e. individuated features of the world without individuating conditions, no longer makes any sense.

The second implication of Heidegger's treatment of the reality problem is that in the context of his position it is difficult to see what the realism/idealism issue might still be about. Traditionally it has addressed the relationship between subjects and objects, or between things-for-us and things-in-themselves, and the general constellation of appealing but conflicting intuitions, and their respectively problematic consequences, that results from this picture of the epistemological situation. However, rejecting the ontological presuppositions on which these contrasts rest dissolves questions about their relationship. And while this explains both facets of Heidegger's approach to the 'reality problem' – his rejection of the traditional version, and his own unorthodox reinterpretation of it – the general implication is clearly that the realism-idealism contrast is divested of genuine poignancy.

What would it be, against this background, for a phenomenological conception of language to have realist or idealist implications? An answer to this should respect its emphasis on the embeddedness of language-in-the-world and the concomitant rejection of the idea that language has an 'inside' and an 'outside'. Taking a cue from *SZ*'s treatment of idealism and realism, the question should then not be set up in the traditional Cartesian manner, but address the kind of contact we have with objects through language. Traditionally the realism-idealism debate has drawn its poignancy from the worry that there is something problematic about the subject's contact with the world. On the Cartesian picture, most notably, representations – the 'veil of ideas' – both stand between and link subjects and objects. This picture of representations

*intervening* between, i.e. literally coming between, knowing and what is known, underlies the thought that the awareness of objects they mediate is somehow indirect and potentially refractive or occlusive, even generating the possibility of radical deception concerning the existence of external objects. It might therefore be thought that to emphasize the involvement of words, via their presentational and pragmatic sense, in constituting awareness of the world suggests that language too plays the role of intervening representation, thus reintroducing familiar concerns about a potentially problematic breach between the way objects are ‘for us’ and how they are ‘in themselves’. The resultant task, I suggest, is twofold. On the one hand, we need to understand in what sense the use of words is constitutive of the understanding in which they are involved. On the other hand, we need to understand how this involvement fails to generate the possibility of distorting, refracting, or occluding the world in the way intervening representations do. In brief, how can language be understood not as standing *between* us and real objects, but as a way of being *in contact* with them?

The phenomenological conception of language developed here combines two ways in which the involvement of words is constitutive of understanding. The first is Merleau-Ponty’s view that ‘thought tends towards expression as towards its completion’ (*PdP* 206), which, I suggested, should be interpreted as claiming that what a thought is can be understood only in terms of its being expressed. At one level this is a causal claim to the effect that words – as the ontologically enduring linguistic entities – are quite literally the means, the forms or materials, of which we fashion thoughts, and in the absence of which it is difficult to see what would count as having (many) thoughts. However, its point is primarily criterial in the sense that the only general way of understanding and stating what the content of a thought is is in relation to its linguistic expression. In this dual causal-criterial sense the involvement of words is constitutive for the ‘completion’ of thought in the way Merleau-Ponty describes. There is also, second, the Wittgensteinian insight that the use of words in certain ways is constitutive of many forms of practice. This kind of constitution, corresponding to the use of words as means for specific tasks, is again both causal and criterial. For it reflects not only the fact that words are actually used to do these things, but also the tautological sense entailed by the internal link between language use and practice: to use language in such-and-such a way just is to engage in the

corresponding language-game, whereas to use language differently would be to act differently.

To be 'constitutive' in either of these ways thus has a dual aspect. On the one hand the claim is to describe the way in which language is actually (causally) involved in our interaction with the world. On the other hand, there is a criterial aspect in that what it is to be a particular thought or a particular practice involves reference to language. Given either of these modes of constitution, it could be said that language in some sense 'makes possible' the expression of thoughts and content. However, I want to emphasize that rather than attributing to language some obscure transcendental status, to be 'constitutive' in these ways is a prosaic, nuts-and-bolts affair, akin to the way that using a hammer is constitutive of hammering a nail into a wall. Accordingly, to say language has a constitutive function is a descriptive claim rather than some kind of explanation: i.e. it is to describe how language is part of certain phenomena, rather than to identify language as a distinguished entity – so to speak semantic aether – within which meaning arises. This modest sense in which language 'constitutes' meaning is perhaps best conveyed by talking – in a way hinted at by Merleau-Ponty – of 'conditions of actuality' rather than 'conditions of possibility' (cf. *PdP* 48, 74). For these are claims not about what or how linguistic meaning *has to be*, what *could be* meant, but about how it *is* and how language *is actually* involved in generating meaning.

Given these two modes of linguistic meaning constitution, presentational and pragmatic sense can be thought of as explicating different aspects of how the perspective under which objects are linguistically addressed is built up. In view of this, the phenomenological conception of language can be summed up as a kind of perspectivism, provided that several points are borne in mind. First, to someone accustomed to thinking in terms of the distinction between objects-for-us and objects-in-themselves, a perspectivist view might look like idealism. However within a Heideggerian framework, I have argued, that distinction is inoperative, such that linking the concept of an object with access conditions neither entails a loss of genuine contact with the world nor has idealist implications. Second, it might be thought that to talk of perspectivism involves reference to an agent or group that bears such perspectives. While it is, of course, true that linguistic perspectives are borne by groups of speakers, the point of presentational and pragmatic sense is to identify certain factors that make up such perspectives and their differences or

similarities. Furthermore, by focusing on features of public phenomenology, rather than appealing to cognitive or motivational states of speakers, the pragmatic-presentational perspective proposed here respects the need for linguistic sense to be impersonal.<sup>360</sup> Third, to talk of perspectivism does not imply any kind of constraint or limit on knowledge. Not only is expansion or improvement of a linguistic perspective possible – for example, by developing new practices or new means of expression – but it is quite plausible that such processes be driven by the epistemic aims of acquiring better or more comprehensive knowledge of the world.<sup>361</sup> So to say that a phenomenological conception of language is perspectival does not imply that human understanding or knowledge is constrained in some principled sense by the ‘limits of one’s language’. Rather than identifying some kind of transcendental limit on what can be said, observations about the limits of our linguistic perspective are straightforwardly technical in character, hinting at what we have yet to learn to say: not having a way to talk about ... is a limit just as the fact that no-one has yet built a solar powered family car is a ‘limit of mobility’. Finally, acknowledging the possibility of improving or expanding perspectives does not entail that such processes either have or are guided by the ideal of some final, absolute or unconditioned terminus. Rather the pursuit of more expansive and detailed perspectives is better thought of as an open process. The reason for this is not simply that no-one has any clear conception of what such a terminus might be; nor even that the ideal of full determinacy might – as argued in the preceding discussion of Wittgenstein – not be a coherent ideal. It is simply that nothing in real discourse requires it. To conceive of possible improvements to a perspective no more requires directedness towards an ‘absolute’ conception than aspiring to run 100m faster requires an absolute conception of speed.<sup>362</sup>

The second task proposed above is to understand why such perspectival and constitutive modes of linguistic contact should not be thought of – as suggested by

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<sup>360</sup> A commitment, as has been seen, common to Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Frege (cf. 93, 170, and 209 respectively).

<sup>361</sup> Our perspective might be expanded in something like the way Nagel thinks of the pursuit of ‘objectivity’ as a ‘method of understanding’ in which ‘we step back from our initial view of it and form a new conception which has that view and its relation to the world as its object’ (Nagel 1986, 4).

<sup>362</sup> Williams (1977, 64-68) and Nagel (1986, 5) describe improvements to a perspective as conceiving successive higher points of view that commensurate lower ones, and are tempted by the thought that this generates a dialectic tending towards an ‘absolute’ conception or point of view as a somehow implicit norm of enquiry. Although perhaps naturally tempting, the appeal to an ideal terminus is, as indicated above, superfluous.

the intervening representations model – as potentially occluding or refracting awareness of our surroundings. I want to suggest three reasons for thinking that this is not the case. The first is the embeddedness of language in other phenomena, which contrasts with the traditional picture of representations' being, so to speak, sandwiched between the thinking subject and external objects. Such embeddedness, reflected in my talk of 'language-in-the-world', suggests that knowledge of language is not *sui generis*, but is intrinsically bound up with more general awareness of the world. On this picture linguistically constituted knowledge cannot be thought to consist of knowledge of language and knowledge of the world attained through language as two disjunct elements. If any clear sense can be given to this distinction, their relationship would be as two aspects of a symbiotic whole.

The second reason for not thinking of language as a refractive medium on the model of intervening representations is its artefactual ontological status. If we stood to language as we do to natural objects, i.e. as features of the world that exist prior to and independently of our awareness of them, then it might be reasonable to wonder whether it systematically refracted or put limits on our access to the world. In that case language might be presenting the world to us in a way that we are ignorant of. So, for example, if my eyes' lens had always been tainted (rose coloured, say), I might remain unaware that colours are always being presented to me in a refractive manner. This is clearly how philosophers have often thought of mental representations. But that is not how we stand to language. Rather, as something produced by human activity, language has never been completely beyond the pale of human understanding. Moreover, it is something that has been attuned and refined in interaction with the environing world. So although one might be unaware of various nuances and implications of the language one uses, it is implausible to think anyone could speak a language without being to some extent aware of its relation to other aspects of the world. It is therefore difficult to see how language, in contrast to natural entities, could stand in an undiscovered, and systematically refractive, relation to what we understand in using it.<sup>363</sup>

Finally, it is important to realize that there are other models in terms of which linguistic constitution of meaning can be thought of, so that there is no need to assimilate it to the picture of intervening representations. To appreciate this, different

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<sup>363</sup> This point might be made by saying that the appearance-reality distinction does not apply to artefacts, such as language, in the way it is sometimes thought to apply to mental representations.



ways that something might function as an intermediary, or as mediating some effect, should be distinguished. To think of representations as intervening in our awareness of the world is to think of them as effecting what I shall call *material mediation*. The defining feature of material mediation is that whatever functions as an intermediary either forms part of, or leaves some characteristic imprint on the result. Understanding either the process or the result of material mediation consequently requires some mention of the nature of the material intermediary involved. For example, in describing how either a pair of glasses or mental representations affect our awareness of the world, it seems necessary to take account of the optical properties etc. of the respective material intermediary.<sup>364</sup>

An alternative picture is provided by the chemical function of catalysts, these being substances that play a role in either initiating or facilitating some reactive sequence, but which precipitate out to comprise no part of the overall reaction's end product. By definition, a catalyst is something constitutively involved in the (chemical) process, but not the product, of what it brings about. Such mediation – *catalytic mediation* – thus contrasts with material mediation, in which the intermediary is implicated in both the process and product.<sup>365</sup> It is important, I suggest, to realize that instruments, being typically used to bring about states of the world of which they comprise no part, often function in a manner that contrasts in the same way with material mediation. To use the customary example, though a hammer is used to hammer in nails, the result is ('hammer-free') nails in the wall – the hammer is part of the process, but not of its product. In such cases there is surely no temptation to think of instruments as standing *between* us and the world, since in using them we are clearly in direct contact with our surroundings. So part of the point of emphasizing the instrumental character of linguistic signs, as I have been doing, is to suggest both that language is in this kind of direct instrumental contact with the world, and that its mode of mediation is catalytic rather than material. That is, to think of awareness of the world as linguistically mediated does not mean that this awareness remains tacitly dependent on one's grasp of language as such; instead the

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<sup>364</sup> This is the kind of mediation Hegel, for example, attributes to the 'medium' or 'tool' of knowledge (*das Erkennen*) at the start of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>365</sup> In building a house, for example, the water used in mixing the cement is catalytically involved, the bricks materially so. What I am calling 'material mediation' corresponds to the Aristotelian material cause, as 'that from which a thing is made and continues to be made' (Aristotle 1996, 39 [194b23]). Though, of course, in another (non-Aristotelian) sense catalysts might be equally well described as material causes.

latter is immaterial to the result, though not the process of arriving at such understanding. However, once this mode of mediation is recognized, it is not only clear that there is no need to model the constitutive function of language on intervening representations. Rather, given the embeddedness and artefactuality of language, it is also difficult to see any reason to do so.

## **5. Between realism and nonrealism**

Against this background it is perhaps worth reviewing how the phenomenological conception of language developed here relates to other familiar forms of ‘idealist’ or ‘realist’ position. As it turns out, this conception does not straightforwardly – i.e. point for point – contrast with the metaphysical realist’s view with which the last section began. There is, as originally suggested, some conflict with the metaphysical realist’s first commitment to the existence of a ‘fixed totality of mind-independent objects’. For it seems reasonable to object, as Heidegger does, that the independence of objects cannot be defined privatively in terms of mind-independence, and that a positive characterization of such objects in terms of access conditions (construed as individuation conditions) would be needed to make metaphysical realism intelligible. In itself this is not an obviously insurmountable obstacle, though presumably it would push one towards a narrow physicalist construal of ‘reality’ – based on individuation in terms of spatio-temporal coordinates or the influence of particular kinds of force. The real conflict arises from the metaphysical realist’s conflation of the issue of access-independence with that of what is ‘real’. For it is far from clear that mind-independence should determine what ‘really exists’, and less clear still, given that it partly constitutes many features of the world, that language-independence could. Given its perspectival character, my phenomenological conception of language is also at odds with the second metaphysical realist thesis that there is only ‘one true and complete description’ of the world. Clearly the vagueness of this suggestion makes it difficult to assess – what, for example, is ‘complete’ description? However, it at least intimates a contrast with the idea that a language embodies a certain perspective on the world that is subject to change or differences. Yet if the optical metaphor is taken seriously, it seems fairly obvious that pictures of the same scene, painted from different viewpoints, using different palettes, or under different perspective conventions etc. can look quite different without being in any way ‘wrong’. However, once this kind of pluralism of approach is acknowledged, then it seems reasonable to

think that the – again, admittedly vague – idea of correspondence could be invoked to describe the correctness of different pictures of the same scene. So, by this analogy, there is no obvious reason to suppose that a perspectivist conception of language in fact conflicts with the metaphysical realist's thesis of truth as correspondence.<sup>366</sup>

It is perhaps now unsurprising that the relationship with the 'internalist' position Putnam sees as improving on the 'externalist' perspective of metaphysical realism is no more straightforward. This internalism is again characterized by three theses. First, for the internalist '*what objects does the world consist of?*' is a question that it only makes sense to ask *within* a theory or description' (Putnam 1981, 49). Second, internalism allows that there might be 'more than one "true" theory or description of the world' (Putnam 1981, 49). Third, on this perspective, truth 'is an *idealization* of rational acceptability', something justified under 'epistemically ideal conditions' (Putnam 1981, 55). In some respects the phenomenological position I have been developing is closer to this internalist position than to the externalist-metaphysical one. In relating objectivity to 'theory or description' internalism clearly attempts to meet the requirement I have discussed in terms of access or individuation conditions. In acknowledging that there are 'experiential *inputs* to knowledge' (Putnam 1981, 54) it also attempts to distinguish the issue of what exists from that of access-independence, as surely one should. This, together with the commitment to some notion of truth as a norm of enquiry underlies Putnam's conviction that the internalist perspective can be construed as (internal) realism. At the same time, the internalist's allowance that there might be more than one acceptable description of the world seems congenial to the perspectivist view advocated here.

Nonetheless – disregarding the obscurity of an appeal to 'epistemically ideal conditions'<sup>367</sup> – my position is more saliently opposed to Putnam's so-called internal realism, with its invocation of interiority, than it is to metaphysical realism. This interiority is defined in relation to conceptual schemes, with internal realism accepting that "'Objects" do not exist independently of conceptual schemes' and that objectivity is '*objectivity for us*' (Putnam 1981, 52, 55). However, since they are

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<sup>366</sup> Indeed Heidegger's view that language serves to pick out features of the real world seems to require some kind of correspondence – though of course the difficulty is to state what kind. An interesting proposal for the direction to take is Randall's idea of 'functional realism', which is based not on a 'structural correspondence', but 'a functional "correspondence" between factors in the instrument and in the materials' which is 'not discoverable except as the instrument does what it is intended to do' (Randall 1963, 55).

<sup>367</sup> Which is duly criticized by, for example, Wright (1992, 44-46).

supposed to be instantiated in language use, it is difficult to see how the notion of conceptual schemes can sustain inside-outside imagery. For the whole point of my talk of language as ‘language-in the world’ is that phenomenological adequacy requires conceiving language as ontologically and functionally founded in the wider world, so that its use cannot create a schism between objects-in-themselves and objects-for-us.<sup>368</sup> Indeed, to describe the way certain linguistic or conceptual means determine access to objects in the world in terms of an inside-outside topology seems simply to misappropriate the traditional picture of mental representations intervening between thinking subjects and the physical world. But despite its plausibility with phenomena such as perception, it is – as the last section argued – both unnecessary and misleading to transfer the intervening representations model to linguistic phenomena.

Although Putnam thinks of the internalist perspective as a form of realism, in holding that knowledge deals only in ‘objectivity for us’, this position has obvious proximity to positions otherwise labelled ‘idealism’. Thus the identification of an ‘internal’ aspect of representation that conditions and constrains agents’ cognitive access to the world is reminiscent not only – as Putnam (1981, 60-64) himself emphasizes – of Kant’s transcendental idealism, but also of the nonsolipsistic type of linguistic idealism sometimes associated with the late Wittgenstein. This line of thought arises from Wittgenstein’s evocative talk of the ‘limits of language’ and the supposed role of ‘grammatical propositions’ in delimiting sense from nonsense.<sup>369</sup> As Bernard Williams (1981, 152 f.) describes it, the basic gambit of such linguistic idealism is to treat the ‘fact that our language is such and such’ as a ‘transcendental’ fact which issues in a form of idealism insofar as ‘everything can be expressed only via human interests and concerns’. Now, while it is plausible that language should have such a transcendental status on the calculus view and its supposed autonomy of language, it seems to me, as set out above, that in later writings the predominance of the language-game analogy led Wittgenstein increasingly to an embedded view of language that eroded the supposed categorial difference between grammatical and empirical facts, on which a transcendentalist reading of his views relies.<sup>370</sup> Exegetic

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<sup>368</sup> As Rorty (1989, 13-15) has emphasized, Davidson’s critique of the idea of conceptual schemes leads by a different route to the same conclusion (cf. Davidson 2001, 198; 1986, 445 f.).

<sup>369</sup> Most prominent in the *Tractatus* (e.g. Introduction, 5.6-5.632), but also at *PU* §119.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. III.2.(ii) above. Sacks (2000, 198-218) describes Wittgenstein’s position as relying on ‘transcendental features’, understood as empirically and hence contingently generated features that are

considerations aside, however, two reminders should suffice to show that the phenomenological conception of language advocated here is not to be interpreted as linguistic idealism of the kind Williams characterizes. First, the view of linguistic constitution outlined in the last section does not attribute language with transcendental feats. Rather, as I put it, on the phenomenological view language functions as a condition of actuality, not possibility, for meaning. Second, given the openness continually to develop or expand the linguistic perspective we have on the world, the idea that language ‘limits’ what can be said is unconvincing. Like the limits of scientific knowledge, such supposed limits are simply a reflection of what can be done here and now (i.e. empirically) rather than principled ones.<sup>371</sup>

The fact that my phenomenological conception of language cannot be straightforwardly aligned to either of the perspectives Putnam distinguishes, or to linguistic idealism, is indicative of a fundamental difference. Both Putnam’s alternatives and the idea of linguistic idealism conspicuously operate with the same basic coordinates of internal and external, things-for-us and (‘mind independent’) things-in-themselves, as the Cartesian tradition.<sup>372</sup> Here, however, I have been emphasizing that a phenomenologically adequate conception of language should treat language as not having an inside-outside topology. The failure to match up with the familiar alternatives discussed here is one consequence of this approach. For, just as Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*, its rejection of a presupposed basic dualism makes it a hybrid seeking to reconcile the desirable aspects of each of the traditionally opposing ‘internalist’ and ‘externalist’ positions. A more profound consequence, as previously pointed out, is that without an inside-outside topology the traditional realism-idealism contraposition loses its point. It seems to me that the conclusion to be drawn from this situation, paralleling Heidegger’s own response, is that to ask of a phenomenological conception of language-in-the-world whether it is idealist or realist is simply not an illuminating question: it is neither or both, depending on how the question is

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treated as having transcendental status. Although exegetically plausible for the *PU*, it seems to me, as Sacks highlights, that this empirical-transcendental hybrid is ill-suited to underwrite genuinely transcendental claims. – Wittgenstein himself seems to have seen debates between idealists and realists simply as verbal disagreements, suggesting in one passage that they differ only in their ‘battle cries’ (Z §414; cf. *PU* §402).

<sup>371</sup> That is, I am claiming there are ‘limits of language’ only in what Williams (1981, 151) calls the ‘tautological’ and ‘empirical’ sense.

<sup>372</sup> As a matter of course Putnam treats the alternative to an ‘external’ perspective as an ‘internal’ one. – Cf. also his suggestion that the main problem of 20th century analytic philosophy has been to work out how language ‘hooks onto the world’ (Putnam 1990, 43) – a formulation bizarrely suggesting that language is not itself part of the world and could conceivably become ‘unhooked’.

meant.<sup>373</sup> Or rather, the lesson to be drawn is that commitment to phenomenological adequacy issues in a conception of language that is beyond the realism-idealism alternative. The implication of a phenomenological approach, in other words, is that language is not itself the kind of thing that has realist or nonrealist implications.

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<sup>373</sup> Another possible response would be to reinterpret certain concerns traditionally linked with the realism-idealism independently of an underlying dualist picture. A prominent suggestion in this spirit are the realism-antirealism distinctions proposed by Michael Dummett (1978, 1993), focusing on the evidence-independence, logical behaviour, or reducibility of certain propositions. Although there is no direct engagement between my position here, due to its subpropositional focus, and Dummett's concerns, it might be suspected that either my talk of 'access conditions' or the idea that language blends practical and cognitive structuration entails a general antirealism. I am inclined to think a phenomenological approach would also prove neutral with regard to the realism-antirealism distinction, and in particular that Dummettian realism could not entail rejection of access conditions, in the weak tautological sense proposed above, without problematically giving up the idea of determinate states-of-affairs. However, as Dummett's discussion deals with statements rather than objects, to address either this issue or the first – which would require further development of my position here to establish how words' pragmatic and predicative sense constrain sentential or propositional content – would lead significantly beyond the scope of the present thesis.

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